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COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. CCLV.

RUTH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

RUTH.

A NOVEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "MARY BARTON."

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1853.

COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. CCLV.

RUTH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

"I wonder what time they will come at?" inquired Mary.

"Your papa said they would be at the station at five o'clock. And the landlady at the Swan said it would take them half an hour to get here."

"And they are to dine at six?" asked Elizabeth.

"Yes," answered Ruth. "And I think if we had our tea half an our earlier, at half-past four, and then went out for a walk, we should be nicely out of the way just during the bustle of the arrival and dinner; and we could be in the drawing-room ready against your papa came in after dinner."

"Oh! that would be nice," said they; and tea was ordered accordingly.

The south-westerly wind had dropped, and the clouds were stationary, when they went out on the sands. They dug little holes near the in-coming tide, and made canals to them from the water, and blew the light sea-foam against each other; and then stole on tiptoe near to the groups of grey and white sea-gulls, which despised their caution, flying softly and slowly away to a little distance as soon as they drew near. And in all this Ruth was as great a child as any. Only she longed for Leonard with a mother's

longing, as indeed she did every day, and all hours of the day. By-and-by the clouds thickened yet more, and one or two drops of rain were felt. It was very little, but Ruth feared a shower for her delicate Elizabeth, and besides, the September evening was fast closing in the dark and sunless day. As they turned homewards in the rapidly increasing dusk, they saw three figures on the sand near the rocks, coming in their direction.

"Papa and Mr. Donne!" exclaimed Mary. "Now we shall see him!"

"Which do you make out is him?" asked Elizabeth.

"Oh! the tall one, to be sure. Don't you see how papa always turns to him, as if he was speaking to him, and not to the other?"

"Who is the other?" asked Elizabeth.

"Mr. Bradshaw said that Mr. Farquhar and Mr. Hickson would come with him. But that is not Mr. Farquhar, I am sure," said Ruth.

The girls looked at each other, as they always did, when Ruth mentioned Mr. Farquhar's name; but she was perfectly unconscious both of the look and of the conjectures which gave rise to it.

As soon as the two parties drew near, Mr. Bradshaw called out in his strong voice,

"Well, my dears! we found there was an hour before dinner, so we came down upon the sands, and here you are."

The tone of his voice assured them that he was in a bland and indulgent mood, and the two little girls ran towards him. He kissed them, and shook hands with Ruth; told his companions that these were the little girls who were tempting him to this extravagance of purchasing Eagle's Crag; and then, rather doubtfully, and because he saw that Mr. Donne expected it, he introduced "My daughters' governess, Mrs. Denbigh."

It was growing darker every moment, and it was time they should hasten back to they rocks, which were even now indistinct in the grey haze. Mr. Bradshaw held a hand of each of his daughters, and Ruth walked alongside, the two strange gentlemen being on the outskirts of the party.

Mr. Bradshaw began to give his little girls some home news. He told them that Mr. Farquhar was ill, and could not accompany them; but Jemima and their mamma were quite well.

The gentleman nearest to Ruth spoke to her.

"Are you fond of the sea?" asked he. There was no answer, so he repeated his question in a different form.

"Do you enjoy staying by the sea-side, I should rather ask?"

The reply was "Yes," rather breathed out in a deep inspiration than spoken in a sound. The sands heaved and trembled beneath Ruth. The figures near her vanished into strange nothingness; the sounds of their voices were as distant sounds in a dream, while the echo of one voice thrilled through and through. She could have caught at his arm for support, in the awful dizziness which wrapped her up, body and soul. That voice! No! if name, and face, and figure, were all changed, that voice was the same which had touched her girlish heart, which had spoken most tender words of love, which had won, and wrecked her, and which she had last heard in the low mutterings of fever. She dared not look round to see the figure of him who spoke, dark as it was. She knew he was there — she heard him speak in the manner in which he used to address strangers years ago; perhaps she answered him, perhaps she did not — God knew. It seemed as if weights were tied to

her feet — as if the steadfast rocks receded — as if time stood still; — it was so long, so terrible, that path across the reeling sand.

At the foot of the rocks they separated. Mr. Bradshaw, afraid lest dinner should cool, preferred the shorter way for himself and his friends. On Elizabeth's account, the girls were to take the longer and easier path, which wound upwards through a rocky field, where larks' nests abounded, and where wild thyme and heather were now throwing out their sweets to the soft night-air.

The little girls spoke in eager discussion of the strangers. They appealed to Ruth, but Ruth did not answer, and they were too impatient to convince each other to repeat the question. The first little ascent from the sands to the field surmounted, Ruth sat down suddenly, and covered her face with her hands. This was so unusual — their wishes, their good, was so invariably the rule of motion or of rest in their walks — that the girls, suddenly checked, stood silent and affrighted in surprise. They were still more startled when Ruth wailed aloud some inarticulate words.

"Are you not well, dear Mrs. Denbigh?" asked

Elizabeth, gently, kneeling down on the grass by Ruth.

She sat facing the west. The low watery twilight was on her face as she took her hands away. So pale, so haggard, so wild and wandering a look, the girls had never seen on human countenance before.

"Well! what are you doing here with me? You should not be with me," said she, shaking her head slowly.

They looked at each other.

"You are sadly tired," said Elizabeth, soothingly. "Come home, and let me help you to bed. I will tell papa you are ill, and ask him to send for a doctor."

Ruth looked at her, as if she did not understand the meaning of her words. No more she did at first. But by-and-by the dulled brain began to think most vividly and rapidly, and she spoke in a sharp way which deceived the girls into a belief that nothing had been the matter.

"Yes! I was tired. I am tired. Those sands — oh! those sands, those weary, dreadful sands! But that is all over now. Only my heart aches still. Feel *how it flutters* and beats," said she, taking

Elizabeth's hand, and holding it to her side. "I am quite well, though," she continued, reading pity in the child's looks, as she felt the trembling, quivering beat. "We will go straight to the dressing-room, and read a chapter, that will still my heart; and then I'll go to bed, and Mr. Bradshaw will excuse me, I know, this one night. I only ask for one night. Put on your right frocks, dears, and do all you ought to do. But I know you will," said she, bending down to kiss Elizabeth, and then, before she had done so, raising her head abruptly. "You are good and dear girls — God keep you so!"

By a strong effort at self-command, she went onwards at an even pace, neither rushing nor pausing to sob and think. The very regularity of motion calmed her. The front and back doors of the house were on two sides, at right angles with each other. They all shrunk a little from the idea of going in at the front door, now that the strange gentlemen were about, and, accordingly, they went through the quiet farm-yard right into the bright, ruddy kitchen, where the servants were dashing about with the dinner things. It was a contrast in more than colour to the lonely dusky field, which even the little girls per-

ceived; and the noise, the warmth, the very bustle of the servants, were a positive relief to Ruth, and for the time lifted off the heavy press of pent-up passion. A silent house, with moonlit rooms, or with a faint gloom brooding over the apartments, would have been more to be dreaded. Then, she must have given way, and cried out. As it was, she went up the old awkward back stairs, and into the room they were to sit in. There was no candle. Mary volunteered to go down for one; and when she returned she was full of the wonders of preparation in the drawing-room, and ready and eager to dress, so as to take her place there before the gentlemen had finished dinner. But she was struck by the strange paleness of Ruth's face, now that the light fell upon it.

"Stay up here, dear Mrs. Denbigh! We 'll tell papa you are tired, and are gone to bed."

Another time Ruth would have dreaded Mr. Bradshaw's displeasure; for it was an understood thing that no one was to be ill or tired in his household without leave asked, and cause given and assigned. But she never thought of that now. Her great desire was to hold quiet till she was alone. Quietness it was not — it was rigidity; but she suc-

ceeded in being rigid in look and movement, and went through her duties to Elizabeth (who preferred remaining with her up-stairs) with wooden precision. But her heart felt at times like ice, at times like burning fire; always a heavy, heavy weight within her. At last Elizabeth went to bed. Still Ruth dared not think. Mary would come up-stairs soon; and with a strange, sick, shrinking yearning, Ruth awaited her — and the crumbs of intelligence she might drop out about *him*. Ruth's sense of hearing was quickened to miserable intensity as she stood before the chimney-piece, grasping it tight with both hands — gazing into the dying fire, but seeing — not the dead grey embers, or the little sparks of vivid light that ran hither and thither among the wood-ashes — but an old farm-house, and climbing winding road, and a little golden breezy common, with a rural inn on the hill-top, far, far away. And through the thoughts of the past came the sharp sounds of the present — of three voices, one of which was almost silence, it was so hushed. Indifferent people would only have guessed that Mr. Donne was speaking by the quietness in which the others listened; but Ruth heard the voice and many of the words, though they

conveyed no idea to her mind. She was too much stunned even to feel curious to know to what they related. *He* spoke. That was her one fact.

Presently up came Mary, bounding, exultant. Papa had let her stay up one quarter of an hour longer, because Mr. Hickson had asked. Mr. Hickson was so clever! She did not know what to make of Mr. Donne, he seemed such a dawdle. But he was very handsome. Had Ruth seen him? Oh, no! She could not, it was so dark on those stupid sands. Well, never mind, she would see him to-morrow. She *must* be well to-morrow. Papa seemed a good deal put out that neither she nor Elizabeth were in the drawing-room to-night; and his last words were, "Tell Mrs. Denbigh I hope" (and papa's "hopes" always meant "expect") "she will be able to make breakfast at nine o'clock;" and then she would see Mr. Donne.

That was all Ruth heard about him. She went with Mary into her bedroom, helped her to undress, and put the candle out. At length she was alone in her own room! At length!

But the tension did not give way immediately. She fastened her door, and threw open the window, cold and threatening as was the night. She tore off her

gown; she put her hair back from her heated face. It seemed now as if she could not think — as if thought and emotion had been repressed so sternly that they would not come to relieve her stupified brain. Till all at once, like a flash of lightning, her life, past and present, was revealed to her to its minutest detail. And when she saw her very present "Now," the strange confusion of agony was too great to be borne, and she cried aloud. Then she was quite dead, and listened as to the sound of galloping armies.

"If I might see him! If I might see him! If I might just ask him why he left me; if I had vexed him in any way; it was so strange — so cruel! It was not him, it was his mother," said she, almost fiercely, as if answering herself. "Oh, God! but he might have found me out before this," she continued, sadly. "He did not care for me, as I did for him. He did not care for me at all," she went on wildly and sharply. "He did me cruel harm. I can never again lift up my face in innocence. They think I have forgotten all, because I do not speak. Oh, darling love! am I talking against you?" asked she, tenderly. "I am so torn and perplexed! You, who are the father of my child!"

But that very circumstance, full of such tender

meaning in many cases, threw a new light into her mind. It changed her from the woman into the mother — the stern guardian of her child. She was still for a time, thinking. Then she began again, but in a low, deep voice,

"He left me. He might have been hurried off, but he might have inquired — he might have learnt, and explained. He left me to bear the burden and the shame; and never cared to learn, as he might have done, of Leonard's birth. He has no love for his child, and I will have no love for him."

She raised her voice while uttering this determination, and then, feeling her own weakness, she moaned out, "Alas! alas!"

And then she started up, for all this time she had been rocking herself backwards and forwards as she sat on the ground, and began to pace the room with hurried steps.

"What am I thinking of? Where am I? I who have been praying these years and years to be worthy to be Leonard's mother. My God! what a depth of sin is in my heart! Why, the old time would be as white as snow to what it would be now, if I sought *him out, and prayed* for the explanation, which should

re-establish him in my heart. I who have striven (or made a mock of trying) to learn God's holy will, in order to bring up Leonard into the full strength of a Christian — I who have taught his sweet innocent lips to pray 'Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil;' and yet, somehow, I've been longing to give him to his father, who is — who is —" she almost choked, till at last she cried sharp out, "Oh, my God! I do believe Leonard's father is a bad man, and yet, oh! pitiful God, I love him; I cannot forget — I cannot!"

She threw her body half out of the window into the cold night air. The wind was rising, and came in great gusts. The rain beat down on her. It did her good. A still, calm night would not have soothed her as this did. The wild tattered clouds, hurrying past the moon, gave her a foolish kind of pleasure that almost made her smile a vacant smile. The blast-driven rain came on her again, and drenched her hair through and through. The words "stormy wind fulfilling his word" came into her mind.

She sat down on the floor. This time her hands were clasped round her knees. The uneasy rocking *motion was stilled.*

"I wonder if my darling is frightened with this blustering, noisy wind. I wonder if he is awake."

And then her thoughts went back to the various times of old, when, affrighted by the weather — sounds so mysterious in the night — he had crept into her bed and clung to her, and she had soothed him, and sweetly awed him into stillness and childlike faith, by telling him of the goodness and power of God.

Of a sudden, she crept to a chair, and there knelt as in the very presence of God, hiding her face, at first not speaking a word (for did He not know her heart), but by-and-by moaning out, amid her sobs and tears (and now for the first time she wept),

"Oh, my God, help me, for I am very weak. My God! I pray thee be my rock and my strong fortress, for I of myself am nothing. If I ask in His name, thou wilt give it me. In the name of Jesus Christ I pray for strength to do Thy will!"

She could not think, or, indeed, remember anything but that she was weak, and God was strong, and "a very present help in time of trouble;" and the wind rose yet higher, and the house shook and vibrated as, in measured time, the great and terrible gusts *came from the four* quarters of the heavens and blew

around it, dying away in the distance with loud and unearthly wails, which were not utterly still before the sound of the coming blast was heard like the trumpets of the vanguard of the Prince of Air.

There was a knock at the bedroom door — a little gentle knock, and a soft, child's voice.

"Mrs. Denbigh, may I come in, please? I am so frightened!"

It was Elizabeth. Ruth calmed her passionate breathing by one hasty draught of water, and opened the door to the timid girl.

"Oh, Mrs. Denbigh! did you ever hear such a night? I am so frightened! and Mary sleeps so sound."

Ruth was too much shaken to be able to speak all at once; but she took Elizabeth in her arms to reassure her. Elizabeth stood back.

"Why, how wet you are, Mrs. Denbigh! and there 's the window open, I do believe! Oh, how cold it is!" said she, shivering.

"Get into my bed; dear!" said Ruth.

"But do come too! The candle gives such a strange light with that long wick, and, somehow, your face *does not look like* you. Please, put the candle out,

and come to bed. I am so frightened, and it seems as if I should be safer if you were by me."

Ruth shut the window, and went to bed. Elizabeth was all shivering and quaking. To soothe her, Ruth made a great effort; and spoke of Leonard and his fears, and, in a low hesitating voice, she spoke of God's tender mercy, but very humbly, for she feared lest Elizabeth should think her better and holier than she was. The little girl was soon asleep, her fears forgotten; and Ruth, worn out by passionate emotion, and obliged to be still for fear of awaking her bedfellow, went off into a short slumber, through the depths of which the echoes of her waking sobs quivered up.

When she awoke, the grey light of autumnal dawn was in the room. Elizabeth slept on; but Ruth heard the servants about, and the early farm-yard sounds. After she had recovered from the shock of consciousness and recollection, she collected her thoughts with a stern calmness. He was here. In a few hours she must meet him. There was no escape, except through subterfuges and contrivances that were both false and cowardly. How it would all turn out she could not *say, or even guess.* But of one thing she was clear,

and to one thing she would hold fast; that was, that, come what might, she would obey God's law, and, be the end of all what it might, she would say "Thy will be done!" She only asked for strength enough to do this when the time came. How the time would come — what speech or action would be requisite on her part, she did not know — she did not even try to conjecture. She left that in His hands.

She was icy cold, but very calm when the breakfast-bell rang. She went down immediately; because she felt that there was less chance of a recognition, if she were already at her place behind the tea-urn, and busied with the cups, than if she came in after all were settled. Her heart seemed to stand still, but she felt almost a strange exultant sense of power over herself. She felt, rather than saw, that he was not there. Mr. Bradshaw and Mr. Hickson were, and so busy talking election-politics that they did not interrupt their conversation even when they bowed to her. Her pupils sat one on each side of her. Before they were quite settled, and while the other two gentlemen yet hung over the fire, Mr. Donne came in. Ruth felt as if that moment was like death. She had a kind of desire to make some sharp sound, to relieve a choking sensa-

tion, but it was over in an instant, and she sat on very composed and silent — to all outward appearance, the very model of a governess who knew her place. And by-and-by she felt strangely at ease in her sense of power. She could even listen to what was being said. She had never dared as yet to look at Mr. Donne, though her heart burnt to see him once again. He sounded changed. The voice had lost its fresh and youthful eagerness of tone, though in peculiarity of modulation it was the same. It could never be mistaken for the voice of another person. There was a good deal said at that breakfast, for none seemed inclined to hurry, although it was Sunday morning. Ruth was compelled to sit there, and it was good for her that she did. That half hour seemed to separate the present Mr. Donne very effectively, from her imagination of what Mr. Bellingham had been. She was no analyser; she hardly even had learnt to notice character; but she felt there was some strange difference between the people she had lived with lately and the man who now leant back in his chair, listening in a careless manner to the conversation, but never joining in, or expressing any interest in it, unless it somewhere, or somehow, touched him himself. Now,

Mr. Bradshaw always threw himself into a subject; it might be in a pompous, dogmatic sort of way, but he did do it, whether it related to himself or not; and it was part of Mr. Hickson's trade to assume an interest if he felt it not. But Mr. Donne did neither the one nor the other. When the other two were talking of many of the topics of the day, he put his glass in his eye the better to examine into the exact nature of a cold game-pie at the other side of the table. Suddenly Ruth felt that his attention was caught by her. Until now, seeing his shortsightedness, she had believed herself safe; now her face flushed with a painful, miserable blush. But, in an instant, she was strong and quiet. She looked up straight at his face; and, as if this action took him aback, he dropped his glass, and began eating away with great diligence. She had seen him. He was changed, she knew not how. In fact, the expression, which had been only occasional formerly, when his worse self predominated, had become permanent. He looked restless and dissatisfied. But he was very handsome still; and her quick eye had recognised, with a sort of strange pride, that the eye and mouth were like Leonard's. Although perplexe*d by the straightforward* brave look she had sent

at him, he was not entirely baffled. He thought this Mrs. Denbigh was certainly like poor Ruth; but this woman was far handsomer. Her face was positively Greek; and then such a proud, superb turn of her head; quite queenly! A governess in Mr. Bradshaw's family! Why, she might be a Percy or a Howard for the grandeur of her grace! Poor Ruth! This woman's hair was darker, though; and she had less colour; altogether a more refined-looking person. Poor Ruth! and, for the first time for several years, he wondered what had become of her; though, of course, there was but one thing that could have happened, and perhaps it was as well he did not know her end, for most likely it would have made him very uncomfortable. He leant back in his chair, and, unobserved (for he would not have thought it gentlemanly to look so fixedly at her, if she or any one noticed him), he put up his glass again. She was speaking to one of her pupils, and did not see him.

By Jove! it must be she, though! There were little dimples came out about the mouth as she spoke, just like those he used to admire so much in Ruth, and which he had never seen in any one else — the *sunshine without* the positive movement of a smile.

The longer he looked the more he was convinced; and it was with a jerk that he recovered himself enough to answer Mr. Bradshaw's question, whether he wished to go to church or not.

"Church? how far — a mile? No, I think I shall perform my devotions at home to-day."

He absolutely felt jealous when Mr. Hickson sprang up to open the door, as Ruth and her pupils left the room. He was pleased to feel jealous again. He had been really afraid he was too much "used-up" for such sensations. But Hickson must keep his place. What he was paid for, was doing the talking to the electors, not paying attention to the ladies in their families. Mr. Donne had noticed that Mr. Hickson had tried to be gallant to Miss Bradshaw; let him, if he liked; but let him beware how he behaved to this fair creature, Ruth or no Ruth. It certainly was Ruth; only how the devil had she played her cards so well as to be the governess — the respected governess, in such a family as Mr. Bradshaw's?

Mr. Donne's movements were evidently to be the guide of Mr. Hickson's. Mr. Bradshaw always disliked going to church, partly from principle, partly because he never could find the places in the Prayer-

book. Mr. Donne was in the drawing-room as Mary came down ready equipped; he was turning over the leaves of the large and handsome Bible. Seeing Mary, he was struck with a new idea.

"How singular it is," said he, "that the name of Ruth is so seldom chosen by those good people who go to the Bible before they christen their children. It is a very pretty name, I think."

Mr. Bradshaw looked up. "Why, Mary!" said he, "is not that Mrs. Denbigh's name?"

"Yes, papa," replied Mary, eagerly; "and I know two other Ruths; there 's Ruth Brown here, and Ruth Macartney at Eccleston."

"And I have an aunt called Ruth, Mr. Donne! I don't think your observation holds good. Besides my daughter's governess, I know three other Ruths."

"Oh! I have no doubt I was wrong. It was just a speech of which one perceives the folly the moment it is made."

But, secretly, he rejoiced with a fierce joy over the success of his device.

Elizabeth came to summon Mary.

Ruth was glad when she got into the open air, and away from the house. Two hours were gone and over.

Two out of a day, a day and a half — for it might be late on Monday morning before the Eccleston party returned.

She felt weak and trembling in body, but strong in power over herself. They had left the house in good time for church, so they needed not to hurry; and they went leisurely along the road, now and then passing some country person whom they knew, and with whom they exchanged a kindly placid greeting. But presently, to Ruth's dismay, she heard a step behind, coming at a rapid pace, a peculiar clank of rather high-heeled boots, which gave a springy sound to the walk, that she had known well long ago. It was like a nightmare, where the Evil dreaded is never avoided, never completely shunned, but is by one's side at the very moment of triumph in escape. There he was by her side; and there was still a quarter of a mile intervening between her and the church; but even yet she trusted that he had not recognised her.

"I have changed my mind, you see," said he, quietly. "I have some curiosity to see the architecture of the church; some of these old country churches hav singular bits about them. Mr. Bradshaw kindly di *rected me part* of the way, but I was so much puz

by 'turns to the right,' and 'turns to the left,' that I was quite glad to espy your party."

That speech required no positive answer of any kind; and no answer did it receive. He had not expected a reply. He knew, if she were Ruth, she could not answer any indifferent words of his; and her silence made him more certain of her identity with the lady by his side.

"The scenery here is of a kind new to me; neither grand, wild, nor yet marked by high cultivation; and yet it has great charms. It reminds me of some parts of Wales." He breathed deeply, and then added, "You have been in Wales, I believe?"

He spoke low; almost in a whisper. The little church-bell began to call the lagging people with its quick sharp summons. Ruth writhed in body and spirit, but struggled on. The church-door would be gained at last; and in that holy place she would find peace.

He repeated in a louder tone, so as to compel an answer in order to conceal her agitation from the girls.

"Have you never been in Wales?" He used "never," instead of "ever," and laid the emphasis on that word, in order to mark his meaning to Ruth, and Ruth only. *But he drove her to bay.*

"I have been in Wales, Sir," she replied, in a calm, grave tone. "I was there many years ago. Events took place there, which contribute to make the recollections of that time most miserable to me. I shall be obliged to you, Sir, if you will make no further reference to it."

The little girls wondered how Mrs. Denbigh could speak in such a tone of quiet authority to Mr. Donne, who was almost a member of Parliament. But they settled that her husband must have died in Wales, and, of course, that would make the recollection of the country "most miserable," as she said.

Mr. Donne did not dislike the answer, and he positively admired the dignity with which she spoke. His leaving her as he did, must have made her very miserable; and he liked the pride that made her retain her indignation, until he could speak to her in private, and explain away a good deal of what she might complain of with some justice.

The church was reached. They all went up the middle aisle into the Eagle's Crag pew. He followed them in, entered himself, and shut the door. Ruth's heart sank as she saw him there; just opposite to her; *coming between* her and the clergyman who was to

read out the word of God. It was merciless — it was cruel to haunt her there. She durst not lift her eyes to the bright eastern light — she could not see how peacefully the marble images of the dead lay on their tombs, for he was between her and all Light and Peace. She knew that his look was on her; that he never turned his glance away. She could not join in the prayer for the remission of sins while he was there, for his very presence seemed as a sign that their stain would never be washed out of her life. But, although goaded and chafed by her thoughts and recollections, she kept very still. No sign of emotion, no flush of colour was on her face, as he looked at her. Elizabeth could not find her place, and then Ruth breathed once, long and deeply, as she moved up the pew, and out of the straight burning glance of those eyes of evil meaning. When they sat down for the reading of the first lesson, Ruth turned the corner of the seat so as no longer to be opposite to him. She could not listen. The words seemed to be uttered in some world far away, from which she was exiled and cast out; their sound, and yet more their meaning, was dim and distant. But in this extreme tension of mind to hold in her bewildered agony, it so hap-

pened that one of her senses was preternaturally acute. While all the church and the people swam in misty haze, one point in a dark corner grew clearer and clearer till she saw (what, at another time she could not have discerned at all) a face — a gargoyle I think they call it — at the end of the arch next to the narrowing of the nave into the chancel, and in the shadow of that contraction. The face was beautiful in feature (the next to it was a grinning monkey), but it was not the features that were the most striking part. There was a half-open mouth, not in any way distorted out of its exquisite beauty by the intense expression of suffering it conveyed. Any distortion of the face by mental agony, implies that a struggle with circumstance is going on. But in this face, if such struggle had been, it was over now. Circumstance had conquered; and there was no hope from mortal endeavour, or help from mortal creature to be had. But the eyes looked onward and upward to the "Hills from whence cometh our help." And though the parted lips seemed ready to quiver with agony, yet the expression of the whole face, owing to these strange, stony, and yet spiritual eyes, was high and *consoling. If* mortal gaze had never sought its mean-

ing before, in the deep shadow where it had been placed long centuries ago, yet Ruth's did now. Who could have imagined such a look? Who could have witnessed — perhaps felt — such infinite sorrow, and yet dared to lift it up by Faith into a peace so pure? Or was it a mere conception? If so, what a soul the unknown carver must have had! for creator and handicraftsman must have been one; no two minds could have been in such perfect harmony. Whatever it was — however it came there — imaginer, carver, sufferer, all were long passed away. Human art was ended — human life done — human suffering over; but this remained; it stilled Ruth's beating heart to look on it. She grew still enough to hear words, which have come to many in their time of need, and awed them in the presence of the extremest suffering that the hushed world has ever heard of.

The second lesson for the morning of the 25th of September, in the 26th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel.

And when they prayed again, Ruth's tongue was unloosed, and she also could pray, in His name, who underwent the agony in the garden.

As they came out of church, there was a little

pause and gathering at the door. It had begun to rain; those who had umbrellas were putting them up; those who had not were regretting, and wondering how long it would last. Standing for a moment, impeded by the people who were thus collected under the porch, Ruth heard a voice close to her say, very low but very distinctly,

"I have much to say to you — much to explain. I entreat you to give me the opportunity."

Ruth did not reply. She would not acknowledge that she heard; but she trembled nevertheless, for the well-remembered voice was low and soft, and had yet its power to thrill. She earnestly desired to know why and how he had left her. It appeared to her, as if that knowledge could alone give her a relief from the restless wondering that distracted her mind, and that one explanation could do no harm.

"*No!*" the higher spirit made answer; "*it must not be.*"

Ruth and the girls had each an umbrella. She turned to Mary, and said,

"Mary, give your umbrella to Mr. Donne, and come under mine." Her way of speaking was short and decided; she was compressing her meaning into

as few words as possible. The little girls obeyed in silence. As they went first through the church-yard stile, Mr. Donne spoke again.

"You are unforgiving," said he. "I only ask you to hear me. I have a right to be heard, Ruth! I won't believe you are so much changed, as not to listen to me when I entreat."

He spoke in a tone of soft complaint. But he himself had done much to destroy the illusion which had hung about his memory for years, whenever Ruth had allowed herself to think of it. Besides which, during the time of her residence in the Benson family, her feeling of what people ought to be had been unconsciously raised and refined; and Mr. Donne, even while she had to struggle against the force of past recollections, repelled her so much by what he was at present, that every speech of his, every minute they were together, served to make her path more and more easy to follow. His voice retained something of its former influence. When he spoke, without her seeing him, she could not help remembering former days.

She did not answer this last speech any more than the first. She saw clearly, that, putting aside all thought as to the character of their former relationship,

it had been dissolved by his will — his act and deed; and that, therefore, the power to refuse any further intercourse whatsoever remained with her.

It sometimes seems a little strange how, after having earnestly prayed to be delivered from temptation, and having given ourselves with shut eyes into God's hand, from that time every thought, every outward influence, every acknowledged law of life, seems to lead us on from strength to strength. It seems strange sometimes, because we notice the coincidence; but it is the natural, unavoidable consequence of all, truth and goodness being one and the same, and therefore carried out in every circumstance, external and internal, of God's creation.

When Mr. Donne saw that Ruth would not answer him, he became only the more determined that she should hear what he had to say. What that was he did not exactly know. The whole affair was most mysterious and piquant.

The umbrella protected Ruth from more than the rain on that walk homewards, for under its shelter she could not be spoken to unheard. She had not rightly understood at what time she and the girls were *to dine. From the* gathering at meal-times she must

not shrink. She must show no sign of weakness. But, oh! the relief, after that walk, to sit in her own room, locked up, so that neither Mary or Elizabeth could come by surprise, and to let her weary frame (weary with being so long braced up to rigidity and stiff quiet) fall into a chair anyhow — all helpless, nerveless, motionless, as if the very bones had melted out of her!

The peaceful rest which her mind took was in thinking of Leonard. She dared not look before or behind, but she could see him well at present. She brooded over the thought of him, till she dreaded his father more and more. By the light of her child's purity and innocence, she saw evil clearly, and yet more clearly. She thought that, if Leonard ever came to know the nature of his birth, she had nothing for it but to die out of his sight. He could never know — human heart could never know, her ignorant innocence, and all the small circumstances which had impelled her onwards. But God knew. And if Leonard heard of his mother's error, why nothing remained but death; for she felt, then, as if she had it in her power to die innocently out of such future agony; but *that escape is not so easy.* Suddenly a fresh thought

came, and she prayed that, through whatever suffering, she might be purified. Whatever trials, woes, measureless pangs, God might see fit to chastise her with, she would not shrink, if only at last she might come into His presence in Heaven. Alas! the shrinking from suffering we cannot help. That part of her prayer was vain. And as for the rest, was not the sure justice of His law finding her out even now? His laws once broken, His justice and the very nature of those laws bring the immutable retribution; but if we turn penitently to Him, He enables us to bear our punishment with a meek and docile heart, "for His mercy endureth for ever."

Mr. Bradshaw had felt himself rather wanting in proper attention to his guest, inasmuch as he had been unable, all in a minute, to comprehend Mr. Donne's rapid change of purpose; and, before it had entered into his mind that, notwithstanding the distance of the church, Mr. Donne was going thither, that gentleman was out of the sight, and far out of the reach, of his burly host. But though the latter had so far neglected the duties of hospitality as to allow his visitor to sit in the Eagle's Crag pew with no other guard of *honour than the* children and the governess, Mr. Brad-

shaw determined to make up for it by extra attention during the remainder of the day. Accordingly he never left Mr. Donne. Whatever wish that gentleman expressed, it was the study of his host to gratify. Did he hint at the pleasure which a walk in such beautiful scenery would give him, Mr. Bradshaw was willing to accompany him, although at Eccleston it was a principle with him not to take any walks for pleasure on a Sunday. When Mr. Donne turned round, and recollected letters which must be written, and which would compel him to stay at home, Mr. Bradshaw instantly gave up the walk, and remained at hand, ready to furnish him with any writing materials which could be wanted, and which were not laid out in the half-furnished house. Nobody knew where Mr. Hickson was all this time. He had sauntered out after Mr. Donne, when the latter set off for church, and he had never returned. Mr. Donne kept wondering if he could have met Ruth — if, in fact, she had gone out with her pupils, now that the afternoon had cleared up. This uneasy wonder, and a few mental imprecations on his host's polite attention, together with the letter-writing pretence, passed away the afternoon — *the longest afternoon* he had ever spent; and of

weariness he had had his share. Lunch was lingering in the dining-room, left there for the truant Mr. Hickson; but of the children or Ruth there was no sign. He ventured on a distant inquiry as to their whereabouts.

"They dine early; they are gone to church again. Mrs. Denbigh was a member of the Establishment once; and, though she attends chapel at home, she seems glad to have an opportunity of going to church."

Mr. Donne was on the point of asking some further questions about "Mrs. Denbigh," when Mr. Hickson came in, loud-spoken, cheerful, hungry, and as ready to talk about his ramble, and the way in which he had lost and found himself, as he was about everything else. He knew how to dress up the commonest occurrence with a little exaggeration, a few puns, and a happy quotation or two, so as to make it sound very agreeable. He could read faces, and saw that he had been missed; both host and visitor looked moped to death. He determined to devote himself to their amusement during the remainder of the day, for he had really lost himself, and felt that he had been away too long on a dull Sunday, when people were apt to get hypped if not well amused.

"It is really a shame to be in-doors in such a place. Rain? yes, it rained some hours ago, but now it is splendid weather. I feel myself quite qualified for guide, I assure you. I can show you all the beauties of the neighbourhood, and throw in a bog and a nest of vipers to boot."

Mr. Donne languidly assented to this proposal of going out, and then he became restless until Mr. Hickson had eaten a hasty lunch, for he hoped to meet Ruth on the way from church, to be near her, and watch her, though he might not be able to speak to her. To have the slow hours roll away — to know he must leave the next day — and yet, so close to her, not to be seeing her — was more than he could bear. In an impetuous kind of way, he disregarded all Mr. Hickson's offers of guidance to lovely views, and turned a deaf ear to Mr. Bradshaw's expressed wish of showing him the land belonging to the house ("very little for fourteen thousand pounds"), and set off wilfully on the road leading to the church, from which, he averred, he had seen a view which nothing else about the place could equal.

They met the country people dropping homewards. No Ruth was there. She and her pupils had returned

by the field-way, as Mr. Bradshaw informed his guests at dinner-time. Mr. Donne was very captious all through dinner. He thought it never would be over, and cursed Hickson's interminable stories, which were told on purpose to amuse him. His heart gave a fierce bound when he saw her in the drawing-room with the little girls.

She was reading to them — with how sick and trembling a heart, no words can tell. But she could master and keep down outward signs of her emotion. An hour more to-night (part of which was to be spent in family prayer, and all in the safety of company), another hour in the morning (when all would be engaged in the bustle of departure) — if, during this short space of time, she could not avoid speaking to him, she could at least keep him at such a distance as to make him feel that henceforward her world and his belonged to separate systems, wide as the heavens apart.

By degrees she felt that he was drawing near to where she stood. He was by the table examining the books that lay upon it. Mary and Elizabeth drew off *a little space*, awe-stricken by the future member for

Eccleston. As he bent his head over a book, he said, "I implore you; five minutes alone."

The little girls could not hear; but Ruth, hemmed in so that no escape was possible, did hear.

She took sudden courage, and said, in a clear voice,

"Will you read the whole passage aloud? I do not remember it."

Mr. Hickson, hovering at no great distance, heard these words, and drew near to second Mrs. Denbigh's request. Mr. Bradshaw, who was very sleepy after his unusually late dinner, and longing for bedtime, joined in the request, for it would save the necessity for making talk, and he might, perhaps, get in a nap, undisturbed and unnoticed, before the servants came in to prayers.

Mr. Donne was caught; he was obliged to read aloud, although he did not know what he was reading. In the middle of some sentence, the door opened, a rush of servants came in, and Mr. Bradshaw became particularly wide awake in an instant, and read them a long sermon with great emphasis and unction, winding up with a prayer almost as long.

Ruth sat with her head drooping, more from ex-

haustion after a season of effort than because she shunned Mr. Donne's looks. He had so lost his power over her — his power, which had stirred her so deeply the night before — that, except as one knowing her error and her shame, and making a cruel use of such knowledge, she had quite separated him from the idol of her youth. And yet, for the sake of that first and only love, she would gladly have known what explanation he could offer to account for leaving her. It would have been something gained to her own self-respect, if she had learnt that he was not then, as she felt him to be now, cold and egotistical, caring for no one and nothing but what related to himself.

Home, and Leonard — how strangely peaceful the two seemed! Oh, for the rest that a dream about Leonard would bring!

Mary and Elizabeth went to bed immediately after prayers, and Ruth accompanied them. It was planned that the gentlemen should leave early the next morning. They were to breakfast half an hour sooner, to catch the railway train; and this by Mr. Donne's own arrangement, who had been as eager about his canvassing, the week before, as it was possible for him

to be, but who now wished Eccleston and the Dissenting interest therein very fervently at the devil.

Just as the carriage came round, Mr. Bradshaw turned to Ruth: "Any message for Leonard beyond love, which is a matter of course?"

Ruth gasped — for she saw Mr. Donne catch at the name; she did not guess the sudden sharp jealousy called out by the idea that Leonard was a grown-up man.

"Who is Leonard?" said he, to the little girl standing by him; he did not know which she was.

"Mrs. Denbigh's little boy," answered Mary.

Under some pretence or other, he drew near to Ruth; and in that low voice, which she had learnt to loathe, he said,

"Our child!"

By the white misery that turned her face to stone — by the wild terror in her imploring eyes — by the gasping breath, which came out as the carriage drove away — he knew that he had seized the spell to make her listen at last.

CHAPTER II.

"He will take him away from me. He will take the child from me."

These words rang like a tolling bell through Ruth's head. It seemed to her that her doom was certain. Leonard would be taken from her! She had a firm conviction — not the less firm because she knew not on what it was based — that a child, whether legitimate or not, belonged of legal right to the father. And Leonard, of all children was the prince and monarch. Every man's heart would long to call Leonard "Child!" She had been too strongly taxed to have much power left her to reason coolly and dispassionately, just then, even if she had been with any one who could furnish her with information from which to draw correct conclusions. The one thought haunted her night and day. "He will take my child away from me!" In her dreams she saw Leonard borne away into some dim land, to which she could not follow. Sometimes he sat in a swiftly-moving carriage, at his father's

side, and smiled on her as he passed by, as if going to promised pleasure. At another time, he was struggling to return to her; stretching out his little arms, and crying to her for the help she could not give. How she got through the days, she did not know; her body moved about and habitually acted, but her spirit was with her child. She thought often of writing and warning Mr. Benson of Leonard's danger: but then she shrank from recurring to circumstances, all mention of which had ceased years ago; the very recollection of which seemed buried deep for ever. Besides, she feared occasioning discord or commotion in the quiet circle in which she lived. Mr. Benson's deep anger against her betrayer had been shown too clearly in the old time to allow her to think that he would keep it down without expression now. He would cease to do anything to forward his election; he would oppose him as much as he could; and Mr. Bradshaw would be angry, and a storm would arise, from the bare thought of which Ruth shrank with the cowardliness of a person thoroughly worn out with late contest. She was bodily wearied with her spiritual buffeting.

One morning, three or four days after their de-

parture, she received a letter from Miss Benson. She could not open it at first, and put it on one side, clenching her hand over it all the time. At last she tore it open. Leonard was safe as yet. There were a few lines in his great round hand, speaking of events no larger than the loss of a beautiful "alley." There was a sheet from Miss Benson. She always wrote letters in the manner of a diary. "Monday we did so-and-so; Tuesday, so-and-so, &c." Ruth glanced rapidly down the page. Yes, here it was! Sick, fluttering heart, be still!

"In the middle of the damsons, when they were just on the fire, there was a knock at the door. My brother was out, and Sally was washing up, and I was stirring the preserve with my great apron and bib on; so I bade Leonard come in from the garden, and open the door. But I would have washed his face first, if I had known who it was! It was Mr. Bradshaw, and the Mr. Donne that they hope to send up to the House of Commons, as member of Parliament for Eccleston, and another gentleman, whose name I never heard. They had come canvassing; and when they found my brother was out, they asked *Leonard if they* could see me. The child said 'Yes'

if I could leave the damsons;' and straightway came to call me, leaving them standing in the passage. I whipped off my apron, and took Leonard by the hand, for I fancied I should feel less awkward if he was with me, and then I went and asked them all into the study, for I thought I should like them to see how many books Thurstan had got. Then they began talking politics at me in a very polite manner, only I could not make head or tail of what they meant; and Mr. Donne took a deal of notice of Leonard, and called him to him; and I am sure he noticed what a noble, handsome boy he was, though his face was very brown and red, and hot with digging, and his curls all tangled. Leonard talked back as if he had known him all his life, till, I think, Mr. Bradshaw thought he was making too much noise, and bid him remember he ought to be seen, not heard. So he stood as still and stiff as a soldier, close to Mr. Donne; and as I could not help looking at the two, and thinking how handsome they both were in their different ways, I could not tell Thurstan half the messages the gentlemen left for him. But there was one thing more I must tell you, though I said I would not. When Mr. Donne *was talking to Leonard*, he took off his watch and

chain and put it round the boy's neck, who was pleased enough, you may be sure. I bade him give it back to the gentleman, when they were all going away; and I was quite surprised, and very uncomfortable, when Mr. Donne said he had given it to Leonard, and that he was to keep it for his own. I could see Mr. Bradshaw was annoyed, and he and the other gentleman spoke to Mr. Donne, and I heard them say, 'too barefaced;' and I shall never forget Mr. Donne's proud, stubborn look back at them, nor his way of saying, 'I allow no one to interfere with what I choose to do with my own.' And he looked so haughty and displeased, I durst say nothing at the time. But when I told Thurstan, he was very grieved and angry; and said he had heard that our party were bribing, but that he never could have thought they would have tried to do it at his house. Thurstan is very much out of spirits about this election altogether; and, indeed, it does make sad work up and down the town. However, he sent back the watch with a letter to Mr. Bradshaw; and Leonard was very good about it, so I gave him a taste of the new damson-preserve on his bread for supper."

Although a stranger might have considered this

letter wearisome from the multiplicity of the details, Ruth craved greedily after more. What had Mr. Donne said to Leonard? Had Leonard liked his new acquaintance? Were they likely to meet again? After wondering and wondering over these points, Ruth composed herself by the hope that in a day or two she should hear again; and to secure this end, she answered the letters by return of post. That was on Thursday. On Friday she had another letter, in a strange hand. It was from Mr. Donne. No name, no initials were given. If it had fallen into another person's hands, they could not have recognised the writer, nor guessed to whom it was sent. It contained simply these words:

"For our child's sake, and in his name, I summon you to appoint a place where I can speak, and you can listen, undisturbed. The time must be on Sunday; the limit of distance may be the circumference of your power of walking. My words may be commands, but my fond heart entreats. More I shall not say now, but, remember! your boy's welfare depends on your acceding to this request. Address B. D., Post-office, Eccleston."

Ruth did not attempt to answer this letter till the

last five minutes before the post went out. She could not decide until forced to it. Either way she dreaded. She was very nearly leaving the letter altogether unanswered. But suddenly she resolved she would know all, the best, the worst. No cowardly dread of herself, or of others, should make her neglect aught that came to her in her child's name. She took up a pen and wrote:

"The sands below the rocks, where we met you the other night. Time, afternoon church."

Sunday came.

"I shall not go to church this afternoon. You know the way, of course; and I can trust you to go steadily by yourselves."

When they came to kiss her before leaving her, according to their fond wont, they were struck by the coldness of her face and lips.

"Are you not well, dear Mrs. Denbigh? How cold you are!"

"Yes, darling! I am well;" and tears sprang into her eyes as she looked at their anxious little faces. "Go now, dears. Five o'clock will soon be here, and *then we will* have tea."

"And that will warm you!" said they, leaving the room.

"And then it will be over," she murmured — "over."

It never came into her head to watch the girls, as they disappeared down the lane on their way to church. She knew them too well to distrust their doing what they were told. She sat still, her head bowed on her arms for a few minutes, and then rose up and went to put on her walking things. Some thoughts impelled her to sudden haste. She crossed the field by the side of the house, ran down the steep and rocky path, and was carried by the impetus of her descent far out on the level sands — but not far enough for her intent. Without looking to the right hand or to the left, where comers might be seen, she went forwards to the black posts, which, rising above the heaving waters, marked where the fishermen's nets were laid. She went straight towards this place, and hardly stinted her pace even where the wet sands were glittering with the receding waves. Once there, she turned round, and in a darting glance, saw that as yet no one was near. She was perhaps half a mile or more from the grey silvery rocks, *which sloped away into* brown moorland, interspersed

with a field here and there of golden, waving corn. Behind were purple hills, with sharp, clear outlines, touching the sky. A little on one side from where she stood, she saw the white cottages and houses which formed the village of Abermouth, scattered up and down, and, on a windy hill, about a mile inland, she saw the little grey church, where even now many were worshipping in peace.

"Pray for me!" she sighed out, as this object caught her eye.

And now, close under the heathery fields, where they fell softly down and touched the sands, she saw a figure moving in the direction of the great shadow made by the rocks — going towards the very point where the path from Eagle's Crag came down to the shore.

"It is he!" said she to herself. And she turned round and looked seaward. The tide had turned; the waves were slowly receding, as if loth to lose the hold they had, so lately, and with such swift bounds, gained on the yellow sands. The eternal moan they have made since the world began filled the ear, broken only by the skirl of the grey sea-birds as they alighted in groups on the edge of the waters, or as they rose up

with their measured, balancing motion, and the sunlight caught their white breasts. There was no sign of human life to be seen; no boat, or distant sail, or near shrimper. The black posts there were all that spoke of men's work or labour. Beyond a stretch of the waters, a few pale grey hills showed like films; their summits clear, though faint, their bases lost in a vapoury mist.

On the hard, echoing sands, and distinct from the ceaseless murmur of the salt sea waves, came footsteps — nearer — nearer. Very near they were when Ruth, unwilling to show the fear that rioted in her heart, turned round, and faced Mr. Donne.

He came forward, with both hands extended.

"This is kind! my own Ruth," said he. Ruth's arms hung down motionless at her sides.

"What! Ruth, have you no word for me?"

"I have nothing to say," said Ruth.

"Why, you little revengeful creature! And so I am to explain all before you will even treat me with decent civility."

"I do not *want* explanations," said Ruth, in a *trembling tone.* "We must not speak of the past. You

asked me to come in Leonard's — in my child's name, and to hear what you had to say about him."

"But what I have to say about him relates to you even more. And how can we talk about him without recurring to the past? That past, which you try to ignore — I know you cannot do it in your heart — is full of happy recollections to me. Were you not happy in Wales?" he said, in his tenderest tone.

But there was no answer; not even one faint sigh, though he listened intently.

"You dare not speak; you dare not answer me. Your heart will not allow you to prevaricate, and you know you were happy."

Suddenly Ruth's beautiful eyes were raised to him, full of lucid splendour, but grave and serious in their expression; and her cheeks, heretofore so faintly tinged with the tenderest blush, flashed into a ruddy glow.

"I was happy. I do not deny it. Whatever comes, I will not blench from the truth. I have answered you."

"And yet," replied he, secretly exulting in her admission, and not perceiving the inner strength of which *she must have* been conscious before she would have

dared to make it — "and yet, Ruth, we are not to recur to the past! Why not? If it was happy at the time, is the recollection of it so miserable to you?"

He tried once more to take her hand, but she quietly stepped back.

"I came to hear what you had to say about my child," said she, beginning to feel very weary.

"*Our* child, Ruth."

She drew herself up, and her face went very pale.

"What have you to say about him?" asked she, coldly.

"Much," exclaimed he — "much that may affect his whole life. But it all depends upon whether you will hear me or not."

"I listen."

"Good Heavens! Ruth, you will drive me mad. Oh! what a changed person you are from the sweet, loving creature you were! I wish you were not so beautiful." She did not reply, but he caught a deep, involuntary sigh.

"Will you hear me if I speak, though I may not begin all at once to talk of this boy — a boy of whom any mother — any parent, might be proud? I could *see that, Ruth. I* have seen him; he looked like e

prince in that cramped, miserable house, and with no earthly advantages. It is a shame he should not have every kind of opportunity laid open before him."

There was no sign of maternal ambition on the motionless face, though there might be some little spring in her heart, as it beat quick and strong at the idea of the proposal she imagined he was going to make of taking her boy away to give him the careful education she had often craved for him. She should refuse it, as she would everything else which seemed to imply that she acknowledged a claim over Leonard; but yet sometimes, for her boy's sake, she had longed for a larger opening — a more extended sphere.

"Ruth! you acknowledge we were happy once; — there were circumstances which, if I could tell you them all in detail, would show you how in my weak, convalescent state I was almost passive in the hands of others. Ah, Ruth! I have not forgotten the tender nurse who soothed me in my delirium. When I am feverish, I dream that I am again at Llan-dhu, in the little old bedchamber, and you, in white — which you always wore then, you know — flitting about me."

The tears dropped, large and round, from Ruth's *eyes* — *she could* not help it — how could she?

"We were happy then," continued he, gaining confidence from the sight of her melted mood, and recurring once more to the admission which he considered so much in his favour. "Can such happiness never return?" Thus he went on, quickly, anxious to lay before her all he had to offer, before she should fully understand his meaning.

"If you would consent, Leonard should be always with you — educated where and how you liked — money to any amount you might choose to name should be secured to you and him — if only, Ruth — if only those happy days might return."

Ruth spoke.

"I said that I was happy, because I had asked God to protect and help me — and I dared not tell a lie. I was happy. Oh! what is happiness or misery that we should talk about them now?"

Mr. Donne looked at her, as she uttered these words, to see if she was wandering in her mind, they seemed to him so utterly strange and incoherent.

"I dare not think of happiness — I must not look forward to sorrow. God did not put me here to consider either of these things."

"My dear Ruth, compose yourself! There is no hurry in answering the question I asked."

"What was it?" said Ruth.

"I love you so, I cannot live without you. I offer you my heart, my life — I offer to place Leonard wherever you would have him placed. I have the power and the means to advance him in any path of life you choose. All who have shown kindness to you shall be rewarded by me, with a gratitude even surpassing your own. If there is anything else I can do that you can suggest, I will do it."

"Listen to me!" said Ruth, now that the idea of what he proposed had entered her mind. "When I said that I was happy with you long ago, I was choked with shame as I said it. And yet it may be a vain, false excuse that I make for myself. I was very young; I did not know how such a life was against God's pure and holy will — at least, not as I know it now; and I tell you truth — all the days of my years since I have gone about with a stain on my hidden soul — a stain which made me loathe myself, and envy those who stood spotless and undefiled; which made me shrink from my child — from Mr. Benson, *from his sister*, from the innocent girls whom I teach

— nay, even I have cowered away from God himself; and what I did wrong then, I did blindly to what I should do now if I listened to you."

She was so strongly agitated that she put her hands over her face, and sobbed without restraint. Then, taking them away, she looked at him with a glowing face, and beautiful, honest, wet eyes, and tried to speak calmly, as she asked if she needed to stay longer (she would have gone away at once but that she thought of Leonard, and wished to hear all that his father might have to say). He was so struck anew by her beauty, and understood her so little, that he believed that she only required a little more urging to consent to what he wished; for in all she had said there was no trace of the anger and resentment for his desertion of her, which he had expected would be a prominent feature — the greatest obstacle he had to encounter. The deep sense of penitence she expressed, he mistook for earthly shame; which he imagined he could soon soothe away.

"Yes, I have much more to say. I have not said half. I cannot tell you how fondly I will — how *fondly I do love you* — how my life shall be spent in

ministering to your wishes. Money, I see — I know you despise —"

"Mr. Bellingham! I will not stay to hear you speak to me so again. I have been sinful, but it is not you who should —" She could not speak, she was so choking with passionate sorrow.

He wanted to calm her, as he saw her shaken with repressed sobs. He put his hand on her arm She shook it off impatiently, and moved away in an instant.

"Ruth!" said he, nettled by her action of repugnance, "I begin to think you never loved me."

"I! — I never loved you! Do you dare to say so?'

Her eyes flamed on him as she spoke. Her red round lip curled into beautiful contempt.

"Why do you shrink so from me?" said he, in his turn getting impatient.

"I did not come here to be spoken to in this way,' said she. "I came, if by any chance I could do Leonard good. I would submit to many humiliations for his sake — but to no more from you."

"Are not you afraid to brave me so?" said he "Don't you know how much you are in my power?'

She was silent. She longed to go away, but dreade

lest he should follow her, where she might be less subject to interruption than she was here — near the fisherman's nets, which the receding tide was leaving every moment barer and more bare, and the posts they were fastened to more blackly uprising above the waters.

Mr. Donne put his hands on her arms as they hung down before her — her hands tightly clasped together.

"Ask me to let you go," said he. "I will, if you will ask me." He looked very fierce and passionate and determined. The vehemence of his action took Ruth by surprise, and the painful tightness of the grasp almost made her exclaim. But she was quite still and mute.

"Ask me," said he, giving her a little shake. She did not speak. Her eyes, fixed on the distant shore, were slowly filling with tears. Suddenly a light came through the mist that obscured them, and the shut lips parted. She saw some distant object that gave her hope.

"It is Stephen Bromley," said she. "He is coming to his nets. They say he is a very desperate, violent *man, but he will protect* me."

"You obstinate, wilful creature!" said Mr. Donne, releasing his grasp. "You forget that one word of mine could undeceive all these good people at Eccleston; and that if I spoke out ever so little, they would throw you off in an instant. Now!" he continued, "do you understand how much you are in my power?"

"Mr. and Miss Benson know all — they have not thrown me off," Ruth gasped out. "Oh! for Leonard's sake! you would not be so cruel."

"Then do not you be cruel to him — to me. Think once more!"

"I think once more;" she spoke solemnly. "To save Leonard from the shame and agony of knowing my disgrace, I would lie down and die. Oh! perhaps it would be best for him — for me, if I might; my death would be a stingless grief — but to go back into sin would be the real cruelty to him. The errors of my youth may be washed away by my tears — it was so once when the gentle, blessed Christ was upon earth; but now, if I went into wilful guilt, as you would have me, how could I teach Leonard God's holy will? I should not mind his knowing my past sin, *compared to* the awful corruption it would be if he

knew me living now, as you would have me, lost to all fear of God —" Her speech was broken by sobs. "Whatever may be my doom — God is just — I leave myself in His hands. I will save Leonard from evil. Evil would it be for him if I lived with you. I will let him die first!" She lifted her eyes to heaven, and clasped and wreathed her hands together tight. Then she said: "You have humbled me enough, Sir. I shall leave you now."

She turned away resolutely. The dark, grey fisherman was at hand. Mr. Donne folded his arms, and set his teeth, and looked after her.

"What a stately step she has! How majestic and graceful all her attitudes were! She thinks she has baffled me now. We will try something more, and bid a higher price." He unfolded his arms, and began to follow her. He gained upon her, for her beautiful walk was now wavering and unsteady. The works which had kept her in motion were running down fast.

"Ruth!" said he, overtaking her. "You shall hear me once more. Ay, look round! Your fisherman is near. He may hear me, if he chooses — hear your triumph. I am come to offer to marry you, Ruth; *come what may, I will* have you. Nay — I will make

you hear me. I will hold this hand till you have heard me. To-morrow I will speak to any one in Eccleston you like — to Mr. Bradshaw; Mr. —, the little minister, I mean. We can make it worth while for him to keep our secret, and no one else need know but what you are really Mrs. Denbigh. Leonard shall still bear this name, but in all things else he shall be treated as my son. He and you would grace any situation. I will take care the highest paths are open to him!"

He looked to see the lovely face brighten into sudden joy; on the contrary, the head was still hung down with a heavy droop.

"I cannot," said she; her voice was very faint and low.

"It is sudden for you, my dearest. But be calm. It will all be easily managed. Leave it to me."

"I cannot," repeated she, more distinct and clear, though still very low.

"Why! what on earth makes you say that?" asked he, in a mood to be irritated by any repetition of such words.

"I do not love you. I did once. Don't say I did not love you then; but I do not now. I could never *love you again*. All you have said and done since you

came with Mr. Bradshaw to Abermouth first, has only made me wonder how I ever could have loved you. We are very far apart. The time that has pressed down my life like brands of hot iron, and scarred me for ever, has been nothing to you. You have talked of it with no sound of moaning in your voice — no shadow over the brightness of your face; it has left no sense of sin on your conscience, while me it haunts and haunts; and yet I might plead that I was an ignorant child — only I will not plead anything, for God knows all — But this is only one piece of our great difference —"

"You mean that I am no saint," he said, impatient at her speech. "Granted. But people who are no saints have made very good husbands before now. Come, don't let any morbid, overstrained conscientiousness interfere with substantial happiness — happiness both to you and to me — for I am sure I can make you happy — ay! and make you love me, too, in spite of your pretty defiance. I love you so dearly I must win love back. And here are advantages for Leonard, to be gained by you quite in a holy and legitimate way."

She stood very erect.

"If there was one thing needed to confirm me, you have named it. You shall have nothing to do with my boy, by my consent, much less by my agency. I would rather see him working on the roadside than leading such a life — being such a one as you are. You have heard my mind now, Mr. Bellingham. You have humbled me — you have baited me; and if at last I have spoken out too harshly, and too much in a spirit of judgment, the fault is yours. If there were no other reason to prevent our marriage but the one fact that it would bring Leonard into contact with you, that would be enough."

"It is enough!" said he, making her a low bow. "Neither you nor your child shall ever more be annoyed by me. I wish you a good evening."

They walked apart — he back to the inn, to set off instantly, while the blood was hot in him, from the place where he had been so mortified — she to steady herself along till she reached the little path, more like a rude staircase than anything else, by which she had to climb to the house.

She did not turn round for some time after she was fairly lost to the sight of any one on the shore; *she clambered* on, almost stunned by the rapid beating

of her heart. Her eyes were hot and dry; and at last became as if she were suddenly blind. Unable to go on, she tottered into the tangled underwood which grew among the stones, filling every niche and crevice, and little shelving space, with green and delicate tracery. She sank down behind a great overhanging rock, which hid her from any one coming up the path. An ash-tree was rooted in this rock, slanting away from the sea-breezes that were prevalent in most weathers; but this was a still autumnal Sabbath evening. As Ruth's limbs fell, so they lay. She had no strength, no power of volition to move a finger. She could not think or remember. She was literally stunned. The first sharp sensation which roused her from her torpor was a quick desire to see him once more; up she sprang, and climbed to an out-jutting dizzy point of rock, but a little above her sheltered nook, yet commanding a wide view over the bare naked sands; — far away below, touching the rippling water-line, was Stephen Bromley, busily gathering in his nets; besides him there was no living creature visible. Ruth shaded her eyes, as if she thought they might have deceived her; but no, *there was* no one there. She went slowly *down to her old place*, crying sadly as she went.

"Oh! if I had not spoken so angrily to him — the last things I said were so bitter — so reproachful! — and I shall never, never see him again!"

She could not take in the general view and scope of their conversation — the event was too near her for that; but her heart felt sore at the echo of her last words, just and true as their severity was. Her struggle, her constant flowing tears, which fell from very weakness, made her experience a sensation of intense bodily fatigue; and her soul had lost the power of throwing itself forward, or contemplating anything beyond the dreary present, when the expanse of grey, wild, bleak moors, stretching wide away below a sunless sky, seemed only an outward sign of the waste world within her heart, for which she could claim no sympathy; — for she could not even define what its woes were; and if she could, no one would understand how the present time was haunted by the terrible ghost of the former love.

"I am so weary! I am so weary!" she moaned aloud at last. "I wonder if I might stop here, and just die away."

She shut her eyes, until through the closed lids *came a ruddy* blaze of light. The clouds had parted

away, and the sun was going down in a crimson glory behind the distant purple hills. The whole western sky was one flame of fire. Ruth forgot herself in looking at the gorgeous sight. She sat up gazing, and, as she gazed, the tears dried on her cheeks; and, somehow, all human care and sorrow were swallowed up in the unconscious sense of God's infinity. The sunset calmed her more than any words, however wise and tender, could have done. It even seemed to give her strength and courage; she did not know how or why, but so it was.

She rose, and went slowly towards home. Her limbs were very stiff, and every now and then she had to choke down an unbidden sob. Her pupils had been long returned from church, and had busied themselves in preparing tea — an occupation which had probably made them feel the time less long.

If they had ever seen a sleep-walker, they might have likened Ruth to one for the next few days, so slow and measured did her movements seem — so far away was her intelligence from all that was passing around her — so hushed and strange were the tones of her voice! They had letters from home announcing *the triumphant return* of Mr. Donne as M.P. for Ec-

cleston. Mrs. Denbigh heard the news without a word, and was too languid to join in the search after purple and yellow flowers with which to deck the sitting-room at Eagle's Crag.

A letter from Jemima came the next day, summoning them home. Mr. Donne and his friends had left the place, and quiet was restored in the Bradshaw household; so it was time that Mary's and Elizabeth's holiday should cease. Mrs. Denbigh had also a letter — a letter from Miss Benson, saying that Leonard was not quite well. There was so much pains taken to disguise anxiety, that it was very evident much anxiety was felt; and the girls were almost alarmed by Ruth's sudden change from taciturn languor to eager, vehement energy. Body and mind seemed strained to exertion. Every plan that could facilitate packing and winding-up affairs at Abermouth, every errand and arrangement that could expedite their departure by one minute, was done by Ruth with stern promptitude. She spared herself in nothing. She made them rest, made them lie down, while she herself lifted weights and transacted business with feverish power, never *resting*, and trying never to have time to think.

For in remembrance of the Past there was Re-

morse, — how had she forgotten Leonard these last few days! — how had she repined and been dull of heart to her blessing! And in anticipation of the Future there was one sharp point of red light in the darkness which pierced her brain with agony, and which she would not see or recognise — and saw and recognised all the more for such mad determination — which is not the true shield against the bitterness of the arrows of Death.

When the sea-side party arrived in Eccleston, they were met by Mrs. and Miss Bradshaw and Mr. Benson. By a firm resolution, Ruth kept from shaping the question, "Is he alive?" as if by giving shape to her fears she made their realisation more imminent. She said merely, "How is he?" but she said it with drawn, tight, bloodless lips, and in her eyes Mr. Benson read her anguish of anxiety.

"He is very ill, but we hope he will soon be better. It is what every child has to go through."

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Bradshaw had been successful in carrying his point. His member had been returned; his proud opponents mortified. So the public thought he ought to be well pleased; but the public were disappointed to see that he did not show any of the gratification they supposed him to feel.

The truth was, that he had met with so many small mortifications during the progress of the election, that the pleasure which he would otherwise have felt in the final success of his scheme was much diminished.

He had more than tacitly sanctioned bribery; and now that the excitement was over, he regretted it; not entirely from conscientious motives, though he was uneasy from a slight sense of wrong-doing; but he was more pained, after all, to think that, in the eyes of some of his townsmen, his hitherto spotless *character* had received a blemish. He, who had been *so stern* and severe a censor on the undue influence

exercised by the opposite party in all preceding elections, could not expect to be spared by their adherents now, when there were rumours that the hands of the scrupulous Dissenters were not clean. Before, it had been his boast that neither friend nor enemy could say one word against him; now, he was constantly afraid of an indictment for bribery, and of being compelled to appear before a Committee to swear to his own share in the business.

His uneasy, fearful consciousness made him stricter and sterner than ever; as if he would quench all wondering, slanderous talk about him in the town by a renewed austerity of uprightness; that the slack-principled Mr. Bradshaw of one month of ferment and excitement, might not be confounded with the highly-conscientious and deeply-religious Mr. Bradshaw, who went to chapel twice a day, and gave a hundred pounds a-piece to every charity in the town, as a sort of thank-offering that his end was gained.

But he was secretly dissatisfied with Mr. Donne. In general, that gentleman had been rather too willing to act in accordance with any one's advice, no matter whose; as if he had thought it too much trouble *to weigh the wisdom* of his friends, in which case

Mr. Bradshaw's would have, doubtless, proved the most valuable. But now and then he unexpectedly, and utterly without reason, took the conduct of affairs into his own hands, as when he had been absent without leave only just before the day of nomination. No one guessed whither he had gone; but the fact of his being gone was enough to chagrin Mr. Bradshaw, who was quite ready to have picked a quarrel on this very head, if the election had not terminated favourably. As it was, he had a feeling of proprietorship in Mr. Donne which was not disagreeable. He had given the new M.P. his seat; his resolution, his promptitude, his energy, had made Mr. Donne "our member;" and Mr. Bradshaw began to feel proud of him accordingly. But there had been no one circumstance during this period to bind Jemima and Mr. Farquhar together. They were still misunderstanding each other with all their power. The difference in the result was this. Jemima loved him all the more, in spite of quarrels and coolness. He was growing utterly weary of the petulant temper of which he was never certain; of the reception which varied day after day, according to the mood she was in and the thoughts that were uppermost; and he saw almost startled to find how very

glad he was that the little girls and Mrs. Denbigh were coming home. His was a character to bask in peace; and lovely, quiet Ruth, with her low tones and soft replies, her delicate waving movements, appeared to him the very type of what a woman should be — a calm, serene soul, fashioning the body to angelic grace.

It was, therefore, with no slight interest that Mr. Farquhar inquired daily after the health of little Leonard. He asked at the Bensons' house; and Sally answered him, with swollen and tearful eyes, that the child was very bad — very bad indeed. He asked at the doctor's; and the doctor told him, in a few short words, that "it was only a bad kind of measles, and that the lad might have a struggle for it, but he thought he would get through. Vigorous children carried their force into everything; never did things by halves; if they were ill, they were sure to be in a high fever directly; if they were well, there was no peace in the house for their rioting. For his part," continued the doctor, "he thought he was glad he had had no children; as far as he could judge, they were pretty much all *plague* and no profit." But as he *ended his speech he sighed*; and Mr. Farquhar was

none the less convinced that common report was true, which represented the clever, prosperous surgeon of Eccleston as bitterly disappointed at his failure of offspring.

While these various interests and feelings had their course outside the Chapel-house, within there was but one thought which possessed all the inmates. When Sally was not cooking for the little invalid, she was crying; for she had had a dream about green rushes, not three months ago, which, by some queer process of oneiromancy, she interpreted to mean the death of a child; and all Miss Benson's endeavours were directed to making her keep silence to Ruth about this dream. Sally thought that the mother ought to be told; what were dreams sent for but for warnings; but it was just like a pack of Dissenters, who would not believe anything like other folks. Miss Benson was too much accustomed to Sally's contempt for Dissenters, as viewed from the pinnacle of the Establishment, to pay much attention to all this grumbling; especially as Sally was willing to take as much trouble about Leonard as if she believed he was going to live, and that his recovery depended upon her care. Miss *Benson's great* object was to keep her from having any

confidential talks with Ruth; as if any repetition of the dream could have deepened the conviction in Ruth's mind that the child would die.

It seemed to her that his death would only be the fitting punishment for the state of indifference towards him — towards life and death — towards all things earthly or divine, into which she had suffered herself to fall since her last interview with Mr. Donne. She did not understand that such exhaustion is but the natural consequence of violent agitation and severe tension of feeling. The only relief she experienced was in constantly serving Leonard; she had almost an animal's jealousy lest any one should come between her and her young. Mr. Benson saw this jealous suspicion, although he could hardly understand it; but he calmed his sister's wonder and officious kindness, so that the two patiently and quietly provided all that Ruth might want, but did not interfere with her right to nurse Leonard. But when he was recovering, Mr. Benson, with the slight tone of authority he knew how to assume when need was, bade Ruth lie down and take some rest, while his sister watched. Ruth did not answer, but obeyed in a dull, weary kind of *surprise at being so* commanded. She lay down by

her child, gazing her fill at his calm slumber, and as she gazed, her large white eyelids were softly pressed down as with a gentle irresistible weight, and she fell asleep.

She dreamed that she was once more on the lonely shore, striving to carry Leonard away from some pursuer — some human pursuer — she knew he was human, and she knew who he was, although she dared not say his name even to herself, he seemed so close and present, gaining on her flying footsteps, rushing after her as with the sound of the roaring tide. Her feet seemed heavy weights fixed to the ground; they would not move. All at once, just near the shore, a great black whirlwind of waves clutched her back to her pursuer; she threw Leonard on to land, which was safety; but whether he reached it or no, or was swept back like her into a mysterious something too dreadful to be borne, she did not know, for the terror awakened her. At first the dream seemed yet a reality, and she thought that the pursuer was couched even there, in that very room, and the great boom of the sea was still in her ears. But as full consciousness returned, she saw herself safe in the *dear old room* — the haven of rest — the shelter from

storms. A bright fire was glowing in the little old-fashioned, cup-shaped grate, niched into a corner of the wall, and guarded on either side by whitewashed bricks, which served for hobs. On one of these the kettle hummed and buzzed, within two points of boiling whenever she or Leonard required tea. In her dream that home-like sound had been the roaring of the relentless sea, creeping swiftly on to seize its prey. Miss Benson sat by the fire, motionless and still; it was too dark to read any longer without a candle; but yet on the ceiling and upper part of the walls the golden light of the setting sun was slowly moving — so slow, and yet a motion gives the feeling of rest to the weary yet more than perfect stillness. The old clock on the staircase told its monotonous click-clack, in that soothing way which more marked the quiet of the house than disturbed with any sense of sound. Leonard still slept that renovating slumber, almost in her arms, far from that fatal pursuing sea, with its human form of cruelty. The dream was a vision; the reality which prompted the dream was over and past — Leonard was safe — she was safe; all this loosened the frozen springs, and they gushed forth in her heart, and her lips moved in accordance with her thoughts.

"What were you saying, my darling?" said Mis Benson, who caught sight of the motion, and fancie she was asking for something. Miss Benson bent ove the side of the bed on which Ruth lay, to catch th low tones of her voice.

"I only said," replied Ruth, timidly, "thank Goc I have so much to thank Him for, you don't know."

"My dear, I am sure we have all of us cause t be thankful that our boy is spared. See! he is waker ing up; and we will have a cup of tea together."

Leonard strode on to perfect health; but he wa made older in character and looks by his severe il ness. He grew tall and thin, and the lovely child wa lost in the handsome boy. He began to wonder, an to question. Ruth mourned a little over the vanishe babyhood, when she was all in all, and over the chil hood, whose petals had fallen away; it seemed a though two of her children were gone — the one a infant, the other a bright thoughtless darling; and sh wished that they could have remained quick in h memory for ever, instead of being absorbed in lovin pride for the present boy. But these were only fanc ful regrets, flitting like shadows across a mirror. Pea *and thankfulness* were once more the atmosphere

her mind; nor was her unconsciousness disturbed by any suspicion of Mr. Farquhar's increasing approbation and admiration, which he was diligently nursing up into love for her. She knew that he had sent — she did not know how often he had brought — fruit for the convalescent Leonard. She heard, on her return from her daily employment, that Mr. Farquhar had brought a little gentle pony on which Leonard, weak as he was, might ride. To confess the truth, her maternal pride was such that she thought that all kindness shown to such a boy as Leonard was but natural; she believed him to be

A child whom all that looked on, loved.

As in truth he was; and the proof of this was daily shown in many kind inquiries, and many thoughtful little offerings, besides Mr. Farquhar's. The poor (warm and kind of heart to all sorrow common to humanity) were touched with pity for the young widow, whose only child lay ill, and nigh unto death. They brought what they could — a fresh egg, when eggs were scarce — a few ripe pears that grew on the sunniest side of the humble cottage, where the fruit was regarded as a source of income — a call of in-

quiry, and a prayer that God would spare the child, from an old crippled woman, who could scarcely drag herself so far as the Chapel-house, yet felt her worn and weary heart stirred with a sharp pang of sympathy, and a very present remembrance of the time when she too was young, and saw the life-breath quiver out of her child, now an angel in that heaven, which felt more like home to the desolate old creature than this empty earth. To all such, when Leonard was better, Ruth went, and thanked them from her heart. She and the old cripple sat hand in hand over the scanty fire on the hearth of the latter, while she told in solemn, broken, homely words, how her child sickened and died. Tears fell like rain down Ruth's cheeks; but those of the old woman were dry. All tears had been wept out of her long ago, and now she sat patient and quiet, waiting for death. But after this, Ruth "clave unto her," and the two were henceforward a pair of friends. Mr. Farquhar was only included in the general gratitude which she felt towards all who had been kind to her boy.

The winter passed away in deep peace after the storms of the autumn, yet every now and then a feeling of insecurity made Ruth shake for an instant

Those wild autumnal storms had torn aside the quiet flowers and herbage that had gathered over the wreck of her early life, and shown her that all deeds, however hidden, and long passed by, have their eternal consequences. She turned sick and faint whenever Mr. Donne's name was casually mentioned. No one saw it; but she felt the miserable stop in her heart's beating, and wished that she could prevent it by any exercise of self-command. She had never named his identity with Mr. Bellingham, nor had she spoken about the sea-side interview. Deep shame made her silent and reserved on all her life before Leonard's birth; from that time she rose again in her self-respect, and spoke as openly as a child (when need was) of all occurrences which had taken place since then; except that she could not, and would not, tell of this mocking echo, this haunting phantom, this past, that would not rest in its grave. The very circumstance that it was stalking abroad in the world, and might re-appear at any moment, made her a coward: she trembled away from contemplating what the reality had been; only she clung more faithfully than before to the thought of the great God, who was a rock in the dreary land, where no shadow was.

Autumn and winter, with their lowering skies, were less dreary than the woeful, desolate feelings that shed a gloom on Jemima. She found too late that she had considered Mr. Farquhar so securely her own for so long a time, that her heart refused to recognise him as lost to her, unless her reason went through the same weary, convincing, miserable evidence day after day, and hour after hour. He never spoke to her now, except from common civility. He never cared for her contradictions; he never tried, with patient perseverance, to bring her over to his opinions; he never used the wonted wiles (so tenderly remembered now they had no existence but in memory) to bring her round out of some wilful mood — and such moods were common enough now! Frequently she was sullenly indifferent to the feelings of others — not from any unkindness, but because her heart seemed numb and stony, and incapable of sympathy. Then afterwards her self-reproach was terrible — in the dead of night, when no one saw it. With a strange perversity, the only intelligence she cared to hear, the only sights she cared to see, were the circumstances which *gave confirmation* to the idea that Mr. Farquhar was *thinking of* Ruth for a wife She craved with stinging

curiosity to hear something of their affairs every day; partly because the torture which such intelligence gave was almost a relief from the deadness of her heart to all other interests.

And so spring *(gioventu dell'anno)* came back to her, bringing all the contrasts which spring alone can bring to add to the heaviness of the soul. The little winged creatures filled the air with bursts of joy; the vegetation came bright and hopefully onwards, without any check of nipping frost. The ash-trees in the Bradshaws' garden were out in leaf by the middle of May, which that year wore more the aspect of summer than most Junes do. The sunny weather mocked Jemima, and the unusual warmth oppressed her physical powers. She felt very weak and languid: she was acutely sensible that no one else noticed her want of strength; father, mother, all seemed too full of other things to care if, as she believed, her life was waning. She herself felt glad that it was so. But her delicacy was not unnoticed by all. Her mother often anxiously asked her husband if he did not think Jemima was looking ill; nor did his affirmation to the contrary satisfy her, as most *of his affirmations* did. She thought every *morning, before she got* up, how she could tempt

Jemima to eat, by ordering some favourite dainty for dinner; in many other little ways she tried to minister to her child; but the poor girl's own abrupt irritability of temper had made her mother afraid of openly speaking to her about her health.

Ruth, too, saw that Jemima was not looking well. How she had become an object of dislike to her former friend she did not know; but she was sensible that Miss Bradshaw disliked her now. She was not aware that this feeling was growing and strengthening almost into repugnance, for she seldom saw Jemima out of school-hours, and then only for a minute or two. But the evil element of a fellow-creature's dislike oppressed the atmosphere of her life. That fellow-creature was one who had once loved her so fondly, and whom she still loved, although she had learnt to fear her, as we fear those whose faces cloud over when we come in sight — who cast unloving glances at us, of which we, though not seeing, are conscious, as of some occult influence; and the cause of whose dislike is unknown to us, though every word and action seems to increase it. I believe that this sort of dislike is only shown by the jealous, and that it renders the disliker *even more* miserable, because more continually con-

scious than the object; but the growing evidences of Jemima's feeling made Ruth very unhappy at times. This very May, too, an idea had come into her mind, which she had tried to repress — namely, that Mr. Farquhar was in love with her. It annoyed her extremely; it made her reproach herself that she ever should think such a thing possible. She tried to strangle the notion, to drown it, to starve it out by neglect — its existence caused her such pain and distress.

The worst was, he had won Leonard's heart, who was constantly seeking him out; or, when absent, talking about him. The best was some journey connected with business, which would take him to the continent for several weeks; and, during that time, surely this disagreeable fancy of his would die away, if untrue; and if true, some way would be opened by which she might put a stop to all increase of predilection on his part, and yet retain him as a friend for Leonard — that darling for whom she was far-seeing and covetous, and miserly of every scrap of love and kindly regard.

Mr. Farquhar would not have been flattered if he had known how much his departure contributed to Ruth's rest of mind on the Saturday afternoon on *which he set out on his* journey. It was a beautiful

day; the sky of that intense quivering blue whi
seemed as though you could look through it for ev
yet not reach the black, infinite space which is su
gested as lying beyond. Now and then a thin, to
vaporous cloud floated slowly within the vaulted dep
but the soft air that gently wafted it was not p
ceptible among the leaves on the trees, which did n
even tremble. Ruth sat at her work in the shad
formed by the old grey garden wall; Miss Benson a
Sally — the one in the parlour window-seat mendi
stockings, the other hard at work in her kitchen
were both within talking distance, for it was weath
for open doors and windows; but none of the thr
kept up any continued conversation; and in the int
vals Ruth sang low a brooding song, such as s
remembered her mother singing long ago. Now a
then she stopped to look at Leonard, who was labou
ing away with vehement energy at digging over a sm
plot of ground, where he meant to prick out soi
celery plants that had been given to him. Ruth's he
warmed at the earnest, spirited way in which he thru
his large spade deep down into the brown soil, l
ruddy face glowing, his curly hair wet with the ex
tion; and yet she sighed to think that the days w

over when her deeds of skill could give him pleasure. Now, his delight was in acting himself; last year, not fourteen months ago, he had watched her making a daisy-chain for him, as if he could not admire her cleverness enough; this year — this week, when she had been devoting every spare hour to the simple tailoring which she performed for her boy (she had always made every article he wore, and felt almost jealous of the employment), he had come to her with a wistful look, and asked when he might begin to have clothes made by a man?

Ever since the Wednesday when she had accompanied Mary and Elizabeth, at Mrs. Bradshaw's desire, to be measured for spring clothes by the new Eccleston dressmaker, she had been looking forward to this Saturday afternoon's pleasure of making summer trousers for Leonard; but the satisfaction of the employment was a little taken away by Leonard's speech. It was a sign, however, that her life was very quiet and peaceful that she had leisure to think upon the thing at all; and often she forgot it entirely in her low, chanting song, or in listening to the thrush warbling out his afternoon ditty to his patient mate in the holly-bush below.

The distant rumble of carts through the busy streets

(it was market-day) not only formed a low rolling bass to the nearer and pleasanter sounds, but enhanced the sense of peace by the suggestion of the contrast afforded to the repose of the garden by the bustle not far off.

But besides physical din and bustle there is mental strife and turmoil.

That afternoon, as Jemima was restlessly wandering about the house, her mother desired her to go on an errand to Mrs. Pearson's, the new dressmaker, in order to give some directions about her sisters' new frocks. Jemima went, rather than have the trouble of resisting; or else she would have preferred staying at home, moving or being outwardly quiet according to her own fitful will. Mrs. Bradshaw, who, as I have said, had been aware for some time that something was wrong with her daughter, and was very anxious to set it to rights if she only knew how, had rather planned this errand with a view to dispel Jemima's melancholy.

"And Minnie, dear," said her mother, "when you are there, look out for a new bonnet for yourself; she has got some very pretty ones, and your old one *is so shabby.*"

"It does for me, mother," said Jemima, heavily. "I don't want a new bonnet."

"But I want you to have one, my lassie. I want my girl to look well and nice."

There was something of homely tenderness in Mrs. Bradshaw's tone that touched Jemima's heart. She went to her mother, and kissed her with more of affection than she had shown to any one for weeks before; and the kiss was returned with warm fondness.

"I think you love me, mother," said Jemima.

"We all love you, dear, if you would but think so. And if you want anything, or wish for anything, only tell me, and with a little patience I can get your father to give it you, I know. Only be happy, there's a good girl."

"Be happy! as if one could by an effort of will!" thought Jemima, as she went along the street, too absorbed in herself to notice the bows of acquaintances and friends, but instinctively guiding herself right among the throng and press of carts, and gigs, and market people in High-street.

But her mother's tones and looks, with their comforting power, remained longer in her recollection than *the inconsistency of* any words spoken. When she

had completed her errand about the frocks, she asked to look at some bonnets, in order to show her recognition of her mother's kind thought.

Mrs. Pearson was a smart, clever-looking woman of five or six and thirty. She had all the variety of small-talk at her finger ends that was formerly needed by barbers to amuse the people who came to be shaved. She had admired the town till Jemima was weary of its praises, sick and oppressed by its sameness, as she had been these many weeks.

"Here are some bonnets, Ma'am, that will be just the thing for you — elegant and tasty, yet quite of the simple style, suitable to young ladies. Oblige me by trying on this white silk!"

Jemima looked at herself in the glass; she was obliged to own it was very becoming, and perhaps not the less so for the flush of modest shame which came into her cheeks as she heard Mrs. Pearson's open praises of the "rich, beautiful hair," and the "Oriental eyes" of the wearer.

"I induced the young lady who accompanied your sisters the other day — the governess, is she, Ma'am?"

"Yes — Mrs. Denbigh is her name," said Jemima, *clouding* over.

"Thank you, Ma'am. Well, I persuaded Mrs. Denbigh to try on that bonnet, and you can't think how charming she looked in it; and yet I don't think it became her as much as it does you."

"Mrs. Denbigh is very beautiful," said Jemima, taking off the bonnet, and not much inclined to try on any other.

"Very, Ma'am. Quite a peculiar style of beauty. If I might be allowed, I should say that hers was a Grecian style of loveliness, while yours was Oriental. She reminded me of a young person I once knew in Fordham." Mrs. Pearson sighed an audible sigh.

"In Fordham!" said Jemima, remembering that Ruth had once spoken of the place as one in which she had spent some time, while the county in which it was situated was the same in which Ruth was born. "In Fordham! Why, I think Mrs. Denbigh comes from that neighbourhood."

"Oh, Ma'am! she cannot be the young person I mean — I am sure, Ma'am — holding the position she does in your establishment. I should hardly say I knew her myself; for I only saw her two or three times at my sister's house; but she was so remarked *for her beauty, that* I remember her face quite well

— the more so, on account of her vicious conduct afterwards."

"Her vicious conduct!" repeated Jemima, convinced by these words that there could be no identity between Ruth and the "young person" alluded to. "Then it could not have been our Mrs. Denbigh."

"Oh, no, Ma'am! I am sure I should be sorry to be understood to have suggested anything of the kind. I beg your pardon if I did so. All I meant to say — and perhaps that was a liberty I ought not to have taken, considering what Ruth Hilton was —"

"Ruth Hilton!" said Jemima, turning suddenly round, and facing Mrs. Pearson.

"Yes, Ma'am, that was the name of the young person I allude to."

"Tell me about her — what did she do?" asked Jemima, subduing her eagerness of tone and look as best she might, but trembling as on the verge of some strange discovery.

"I don't know whether I ought to tell you, Ma'am — it is hardly a fit story for a young lady; but this Ruth Hilton was an apprentice to my sister-in-law, who had a first-rate business in Fordham, which *brought her a* good deal of patronage from the county

families; and this young creature was very artful and bold, and thought sadly too much of her beauty; and, somehow, she beguiled a young gentleman, who took her into keeping (I am sure, Ma'am, I ought to apologise for polluting your ears —)"

"Go on," said Jemima, breathlessly.

"I don't know much more. His mother followed him into Wales. She was a lady of a great deal of religion, and of a very old family, and was much shocked at her son's misfortune in being captivated by such a person; but she led him to repentance, and took him to Paris, where, I think, she died; but I am not sure, for, owing to family differences, I have not been on terms for some years with my sister-in-law, who was my informant."

"Who died?" interrupted Jemima — "the young man's mother, or — or Ruth Hilton?"

"Oh dear, Ma'am! pray don't confuse the two. It was the mother, Mrs. — I forget the name — something like Billington. It was the lady who died."

"And what became of the other?" asked Jemima, unable, as her dark suspicion seemed thickening, to speak the name.

"The girl? Why, Ma'am, what could become of

her? Not that I know exactly — only one knows they can but go from bad to worse, poor creatures! God forgive me, if I am speaking too transiently of such degraded women, who, after all, are a disgrace to our sex."

"Then you know nothing more about her?" asked Jemima.

"I did hear that she had gone off with another gentleman that she met with in Wales, but I'm sure I can't tell who told me."

There was a little pause. Jemima was pondering on all she had heard. Suddenly she felt that Mrs. Pearson's eyes were upon her, watching her; not with curiosity, but with a newly-awakened intelligence; — and yet she must ask one more question; but she tried to ask it in an indifferent, careless tone, handling the bonnet while she spoke.

"How long is it since all this — all you have been telling me about — happened?" (Leonard was eight years old.)

"Why — let me see. It was before I was married, and I was married three years, and poor dear Pearson has been deceased five — I should say, going on for *nine years this* summer. Blush roses would become

your complexion, perhaps, better than these lilacs," said she, as with superficial observation she watched Jemima, turning the bonnet round and round on her hand — the bonnet that her dizzy eyes did not see.

"Thank you. It is very pretty. But I don't want a bonnet. I beg your pardon for taking up your time." And with an abrupt bow to the discomfited Mrs. Pearson, she was out and away in the open air, threading her way with instinctive energy along the crowded street. Suddenly she turned round, and went back to Mrs. Pearson's, with even more rapidity than she had been walking away from the house.

"I have changed my mind," said she, as she came, breathless, up into the show-room. "I will take the bonnet. How much is it?"

"Allow me to change the flowers; it can be done in an instant, and then you can see if you would not prefer the roses; but with either foliage it is a lovely little bonnet," said Mrs. Pearson, holding it up admiringly on her hand.

"O! never mind the flowers — yes! change them to roses." And she stood by, agitated (Mrs. Pearson thought with *impatience*) all the time the milliner was *making the alteration* with skilful, busy haste.

"By the way," said Jemima, when she saw the last touches were being given, and that she must not delay executing the purpose which was the real cause of her return — "Papa, I am sure, would not like your connecting Mrs. Denbigh's name with such a — story as you have been telling me."

"Oh dear! Ma'am, I have too much respect for you all to think of doing such a thing! Of course I know, Ma'am, that it is not to be cast up to any lady that she is like anybody disreputable."

"But I would rather you did not name the likeness to any one," said Jemima; "not to any one. Don't tell any one the story you have told me this morning."

"Indeed, Ma'am, I should never think of such a thing! My poor husband could have borne witness that I am as close as the grave where there is anything to conceal."

"Oh dear!" said Jemima, "Mrs. Pearson, there is nothing to conceal; only you must not speak about it."

"I certainly shall not do it, Ma'am; you may rest assured of me."

This time Jemima did not go towards home, but in the direction of the outskirts of the town, on the hilly side. She had some dim recollection of hearing her

sisters ask if they might not go and invite Leonard and his mother to tea; and how could she face Ruth, after the conviction had taken possession of her heart that she, and the sinful creature she had just heard of, were one and the same?

It was yet only the middle of the afternoon; the hours were early in the old-fashioned town of Eccleston. Soft white clouds had come slowly sailing up out of the west; the plain was flecked with thin floating shadows, gently borne along by the westerly wind that was waving the long grass in the hay-fields into alternate light and shade. Jemima went into one of these fields, lying by the side of the upland road. She was stunned by the shock she had received. The diver, leaving the green sward, smooth and known, where his friends stand with their familiar smiling faces, admiring his glad bravery — the diver, down in an instant in the horrid depths of the sea, close to some strange, ghastly, lidless-eyed monster, can hardly more feel his blood curdle at the near terror than did Jemima now. Two hours ago — but a point of time on her mind's dial — she had never imagined that she should ever come in contact with any one who had committed open sin; she had never shaped her conviction into words and sen-

tences, but still it was *there*, that all the respectable, al- the family and religious circumstances of her life, would hedge her in, and guard her from ever encountering the great shock of coming face to face with vice. Without being pharasaical in her estimation of herself, she had all a Pharisee's dread of publicans and sinners, and all a child's cowardliness — that cowardliness which prompts it to shut its eyes against the object of terror, rather than acknowledge its existence with brave faith. Her father's often reiterated speeches had not been without their effect. He drew a clear line of partition, which separated mankind into two great groups, to one of which, by the grace of God, he and his belonged; while the other was composed of those whom it was his duty to try and reform, and bring the whole force of his morality to bear upon, with lectures, admonitions, and exhortations — a duty to be performed, because it was a duty — but with very little of that Hope and Faith which is the Spirit that maketh alive. Jemima had rebelled against these hard doctrines of her father's, but their frequent repetition had had its effect, and led her to look upon those who had gone astray with shrinking, shuddering recoil, instead of with a pity, so Christ-*like as to have* both wisdom and tenderness in it.

And now she saw among her own familiar associates one, almost her house-fellow, who had been stained with that evil most repugnant to her womanly modesty, that would fain have ignored its existence altogether. She loathed the thought of meeting Ruth again. She wished that she could take her up, and put her down at a distance somewhere — anywhere — where she might never see or hear of her more; never be reminded, as she must be whenever she saw her, that such things were, in this sunny, bright, lark-singing earth, over which the blue dome of heaven bent softly down as Jemima sat in the hay-field that June afternoon; her cheeks flushed and red, but her lips pale and compressed, and her eyes full of a heavy, angry sorrow. It was Saturday, and the people in that part of the country left their work an hour earlier on that day. By this, Jemima knew it must be growing time for her to be at home. She had had so much of conflict in her own mind of late, that she had grown to dislike struggle, or speech, or explanation; and so strove to conform to times and hours much more than she had done in happier days. But oh! how full of hate her heart was growing *against the* world! And oh! how she sickened *at the thought of seeing* Ruth! Who was to be trusted

more, if Ruth — calm, modest, delicate, dignified Ruth — had a memory blackened by sin?

As she went heavily along, the thought of Mr. Farquhar came into her mind. It showed how terrible had been the stun, that he had been forgotten until now. With the thought of him came in her first merciful feeling towards Ruth. This would never have been, had there been the least latent suspicion in Jemima's jealous mind that Ruth had purposely done aught — looked a look — uttered a word — modulated a tone — for the sake of attracting. As Jemima recalled all the passages of their intercourse, she slowly confessed to herself how pure and simple had been all Ruth's ways in relation to Mr. Farquhar. It was not merely that there had been no coquetting, but there had been simple unconsciousness on Ruth's part, for so long a time after Jemima had discovered Mr. Farquhar's inclination for her; and when at length she had slowly awakened to some perception of the state of his feelings, there had been a modest, shrinking dignity of manner, not startled, or emotional, or even timid, but pure, grave, and quiet; and this conduct of *Ruth's*, Jemima instinctively acknowledged to be of *necessity* transparent and sincere. Now, and here,

there was no hypocrisy; but some time, somewhere, on the part of somebody, what hypocrisy, what lies must have been acted, if not absolutely spoken, before Ruth could have been received by them all as the sweet, gentle, girlish widow, which she remembered they had all believed Mrs. Denbigh to be when first she came among them. Could Mr. and Miss Benson know? Could they be a party to the deceit? Not sufficiently acquainted with the world to understand how strong had been the temptation to play the part they did, if they wished to give Ruth a chance, Jemima could not believe them guilty of such deceit as the knowledge of Mrs. Denbigh's previous conduct would imply; and yet how it darkened the latter into a treacherous hypocrite, with a black secret shut up in her soul for years — living in apparent confidence, and daily household familiarity with the Bensons for years, yet never telling the remorse that ought to be corroding her heart! Who was true? Who was not? Who was good and pure? Who was not? The very foundations of Jemima's belief in her mind were shaken.

Could it be false? Could there be two Ruth Hiltons? She went over every morsel of evidence. It could *not be.* *She knew* that Mrs. Denbigh's former name

had been Hilton. She had heard her speak casually, but charily, of having lived in Fordham. She knew she had been in Wales but a short time before she made her appearance in Eccleston. There was no doubt of the identity. Into the middle of Jemima's pain and horror at the afternoon's discovery, there came a sense of the power which the knowledge of this secret gave her over Ruth; but this was no relief, only an aggravation of the regret with which Jemima looked back on her state of ignorance. It was no wonder that when she arrived at home, she was so oppressed with headache that she had to go to bed directly.

"Quiet, mother! quiet, dear, dear mother" (for she clung to the known and tried goodness of her mother more than ever now), "that is all I want." And she was left to the stillness of her darkened room, the blinds idly flapping to and fro in the soft evening breeze, and letting in the rustling sound of the branches which waved close to her window, and the thrush's gurgling warble, and the distant hum of the busy town.

Her jealousy was gone — she knew not how or where. She might shun and recoil from Ruth, but she *now thought that* she could never more be jealous of

her. In her pride of innocence, she felt almost ashamed that such a feeling could have had existence. Could Mr. Farquhar hesitate between her own self and one who — No! she could not name what Ruth had been, even in thought. And yet he might never know, so fair a seeming did her rival wear. Oh! for one ray of God's holy light to know what was seeming, and what was truth in this traitorous hollow earth! It might be —she used to think such things possible, before sorrow had embittered her — that Ruth had worked her way through the deep purgatory of repentance up to something like purity again; God only knew! If her present goodness was real — if, after having striven back thus far on the heights, a fellow-woman was to throw her down into some terrible depth with her unkind, incontinent tongue, that would be too cruel! And yet, if — there was such woeful uncertainty and deceit somewhere — if Ruth — No! that Jemima, with noble candour, admitted was impossible. Whatever Ruth had been, she was good, and to be respected as such, now. It did not follow that Jemima was to preserve the secret always; she doubted her own power to do so, if Mr. Farquhar came home again, and were still *constant in his admiration* of Mrs. Denbigh, and if

Mrs. Denbigh gave him any — the least encouragement. But this last she thought, from what she knew of Ruth's character, was impossible. Only, what was impossible after this afternoon's discovery? At any rate, she would watch, and wait. Come what might, Ruth was in her power. And, strange to say, this last certainty gave Jemima a kind of protecting, almost pitying, feeling for Ruth. Her horror at the wrong was not diminished; but the more she thought of the struggles that the wrong-doer must have made to extricate herself, the more she felt how cruel it would be to baffle all by revealing what had been. But for her sisters' sake she had a duty to perform; she must watch Ruth. For her love's sake she could not have helped watching; but she was too much stunned to recognise the force of her love, while duty seemed the only stable thing to cling to. For the present she would neither meddle nor mar in Ruth's course of life.

CHAPTER IV.

So it was that Jemima no longer avoided Ruth, nor manifested by word or look the dislike which for a long time she had been scarce concealing. Ruth could not help noticing that Jemima always sought to be in her presence while she was at Mr. Bradshaw's house; either when daily teaching Mary and Elizabeth, or when she came as an occasional visitor with Mr. and Miss Benson, or by herself. Up to this time, Jemima had used no gentle skill to conceal the abruptness with which she would leave the room rather than that Ruth and she should be brought into contact — rather than that it should fall to her lot to entertain Ruth during any part of the evening. It was months since Jemima had left off sitting in the school-room, as had been her wont during the first few years of Ruth's governessship. Now, each morning, Miss Bradshaw seated herself at a little round table in the *window, at her work,* or at her writing; but whether

she sewed, or wrote, or read,. Ruth felt that she was always watching — watching. At first, Ruth had welcomed all these changes in habit and behaviour, as giving her a chance, she thought, by some patient waiting or some opportune show of enduring constant love, to regain her lost friend's regard; but by-and-by, the icy chillness, immovable and grey, struck more to her heart than many sudden words of unkindness could have done. They might be attributed to the hot impulses of a hasty temper — to the vehement anger of an accuser; but this measured manner was the conscious result of some deep-seated feeling; this cold sternness befitted the calm implacability of some severe judge. The watching, which Ruth felt was ever upon her, made her unconsciously shiver, as you would if you saw that the passionless eyes of the dead were visibly gazing upon you. Her very being shrivelled and parched up in Jemima's presence, as if blown upon by a bitter, keen, east wind.

Jemima bent every power she possessed upon the one object of ascertaining what Ruth really was. Sometimes the strain was very painful; the constant tension made her soul weary; and she moaned aloud, and upbraided circumstance (she dared not go higher — to

he maker of circumstance) for having deprived her of er unsuspicious happy ignorance.

Things were in this state when Mr. Richard Bradhaw came on his annual home visit. He was to remain another year in London, and then to return and e admitted into the firm. After he had been a week t home, he grew tired of the monotonous regularity f his father's household, and began to complain of it o Jemima.

"I wish Farquhar were at home. Though he is uch a stiff, quiet old fellow, his coming in in the venings makes a change. What has become of the Millses? They used to drink tea with us sometimes, formerly."

"Oh! papa and Mr. Mills took opposite sides at the election, and we have never visited since. I don't think they are any great loss."

"Anybody is a loss — the stupidest bore that ever was would be a blessing, if he only would come in sometimes."

"Mr. and Miss Benson have drank tea here twice since you came."

"Come, that's capital! Apropos of stupid bores,

you talk of the Bensons. I did not think you had so much discrimination, my little sister."

Jemima looked up in surprise; and then reddened angrily.

"I never meant to say a word against Mr. or Miss Benson, and that you know quite well, Dick."

"Never mind! I won't tell tales. They are stupid old fogeys, but they are better than nobody, especially as that handsome governess of the girls always comes with them to be looked at."

There was a little pause; Richard broke it by saying:

"Do you know, Minnie, I've a notion, if she plays her cards well, she may hook Farquhar!"

"Who?" asked Jemima, shortly, though she knew quite well.

"Mrs. Denbigh, to be sure. We were talking of her, you know. Farquhar asked me to dine with him at his hotel as he passed through town, and — I'd my own reasons for going and trying to creep up his sleeve — I wanted him to tip me, as he used to do."

"For shame! Dick," burst in Jemima.

"*Well!* well! not tip me exactly, but lend me

some money. The governor keeps me so deucedly short."

"Why! it was only yesterday, when my father was speaking about your expenses, and your allowance, I heard you say that you 'd more than you knew how to spend."

"Don't you see that was the perfection of art. If my father had thought me extravagant, he would have kept me in with a tight rein; as it is, I 'm in great hopes of a handsome addition, and I can tell you it 's needed. If my father had given me what I ought to have had at first, I should not have been driven to the speculations and messes I 've got into."

"What speculations? What messes?" asked Jemima, with anxious eagerness.

"Oh! messes was not the right word. Speculations hardly was; for they are sure to turn out well, and then I shall surprise my father with my riches." He saw that he had gone a little too far in his confidence, and was trying to draw in.

"But, what do you mean? Do explain it to me."

"Never you trouble your head about my business, my dear. Women can't understand the share-market, *and such things.* Don't think I 've forgotten the awful

blunders you made when you tried to read the st of the money-market aloud to my father, that nig when he had lost his spectacles. What were we tal ing of? Oh! of Farquhar and pretty Mrs. Denbig Yes! I soon found out that was the subject my ge tleman liked me to dwell on. He did not talk abo her much himself, but his eyes sparkled when I to him what enthusiastic letters Polly and Elizabeth wr about her. How old d'ye think she is?"

"I know!" said Jemima. "At least, I heard h age spoken about, amongst other things, when fi she came. She will be five-and-twenty this autum

"And Farquhar is forty, if he is a day. She young, too, to have such a boy as Leonard; young looking, or full as young-looking as she is! I t you what, Minnie, she looks younger than you. H old are you? Three-and-twenty, ain't it?"

"Last March," replied Jemima.

"You 'll have to make haste and pick up son body, if you 're losing your good looks at this ra Why, Jemima, I thought you had a good chance Farquhar a year or two ago. How come you to h lost him? I'd far rather you'd had him than t *proud,* haughty Mrs. Denbigh, who flashes her y

grey eyes upon me if ever I dare to pay her a compliment. She ought to think it an honour that I take that much notice of her. Besides, Farquhar is rich, and it's keeping the business of the firm in one's own family; and if he marries Mrs. Denbigh she will be sure to be wanting Leonard in when he's of age, and I won't have that. Have a try for Farquhar, Minnie! Ten to one it's not too late. I wish I'd brought you a pink bonnet down. You go about so dowdy — so careless of how you look."

"If Mr. Farquhar has not liked me as I am," said Jemima, choking, "I don't want to owe him to a pink bonnet."

"Nonsense! I don't like to have my sisters' governess stealing a march on my sister. I tell you Farquhar is worth trying for. If you'll wear the pink bonnet I'll give it you, and I'll back you against Mrs. Denbigh. I think you might have done something with 'our member,' as my father calls him, when you had him so long in the house. But, altogether, I should like Farquhar best for a brother-in-law. By the way, have you heard down here that Donne is going to be married? I heard of it in town, just before I left, *from a man that* was good authority. Some Sir

Thomas Campbell's seventh daughter: a girl without a penny; father ruined himself by gambling, and obliged to live abroad. But Donne is not a man to care for any obstacle, from all accounts, when once he has taken a fancy. It was love at first sight, they say. I believe he did not know of her existence a month ago."

"No! we have not heard of it," replied Jemima. "My father will like to know; tell it him;" continued she, as she was leaving the room, to be alone, in order to still her habitual agitation whenever she heard Mr. Farquhar and Ruth coupled together.

Mr. Farquhar came home the day before Richard Bradshaw left for town. He dropped in after tea at the Bradshaws'; he was evidently disappointed to see none but the family there, and looked round whenever the door opened.

"Look! look!" said Dick to his sister. "I wanted to make sure of his coming in to-night, to save me my father's parting exhortations against the temptations of the world (as if I did not know much more of the world than he does!), so I used a spell I thought *would prove* efficacious; I told him that we should be

by ourselves, with the exception of Mrs. Denbigh, and look how he is expecting her to come in!"

Jemima did see; did understand. She understood, too, why certain packets were put carefully on one side, apart from the rest of the purchases of Swiss toys and jewellery, by which Mr. Farquhar proved that none of Mr. Bradshaw's family had been forgotten by him during his absence. Before the end of the evening, she was very conscious that her sore heart had not forgotten how to be jealous. Her brother did not allow a word, a look, or an incident, which might be supposed on Mr. Farquhar's side to refer to Ruth, to pass unnoticed; he pointed out all to his sister, never dreaming of the torture he was inflicting, only anxious to prove his own extreme penetration. At length Jemima could stand it no longer, and left the room. She went into the school-room, where the shutters were not closed, as it only looked into the garden. She opened the window, to let the cool night air blow in on her hot cheeks. The clouds were hurrying over the moon's face in a tempestuous and unstable manner, making all things seem unreal; now clear out in its bright light, now trembling and *quivering in shadow.* The pain at her heart seemed

to make Jemima's brain grow dull; she laid her head on her arms, which rested on the window-sill, and grew dizzy with the sick weary notion that the earth was wandering lawless and aimless through the heavens, where all seemed one tossed and whirling wrack of clouds. It was a waking nightmare, from the uneasy heaviness of which she was thankful to be roused by Dick's entrance.

"What, you are here, are you? I have been looking everywhere for you. I wanted to ask you if you have any spare money you could lend me for a few weeks?"

"How much do you want?" asked Jemima, in a dull, hopeless voice.

"Oh! the more the better. But I should be glad of any trifle, I am kept so confoundedly short."

When Jemima returned with her little store, even her careless, selfish brother was struck by the wanness of her face, lighted by the bed-candle she carried.

"Come, Minnie, don't give it up. If I were you, I would have a good try against Mrs. Denbigh. I'll *send you the* bonnet as soon as ever I get back to

town, and you pluck up a spirit, and I'll back you against her even yet."

It seemed to Jemima strange — and yet only a fitting part of this strange, chaotic world — to find that her brother, who was the last person to whom she could have given her confidence in her own family, and almost the last person of her acquaintance to whom she could look for real help and sympathy, should have been the only one to hit upon the secret of her love. And the idea passed away from his mind as quickly as all ideas not bearing upon his own self-interests did.

The night, the sleepless night, was so crowded and haunted by miserable images, that she longed for day; and when day came, with its stinging realities, she wearied and grew sick for the solitude of night. For the next week, she seemed to see and hear nothing but what confirmed the idea of Mr. Farquhar's decided attachment to Ruth. Even her mother spoke of it as a thing which was impending, and which she wondered how Mr. Bradshaw would like; for his approval or disapproval was the standard by which she measured all things.

"*Oh! merciful* God," prayed Jemima, in the dead

silence of the night, "the strain is too great — I cannot bear it longer — my life — my love — the very essence of me, which is myself through time and eternity; and on the other side there is all-pitying Charity. If she had not been what she is — if she had shown any sign of triumph — any knowledge of her prize — if she had made any effort to gain his dear heart, I must have given way long ago, and taunted her, even if I did not tell others — taunted her, even though I sank down to the pit the next moment.

"The temptation is too strong for me. Oh Lord! where is Thy peace that I believed in, in my childhood? — that I hear people speaking of now, as if it hushed up the troubles of life, and had not to be sought for — sought for, as with tears of blood!"

There was no sound nor sight in answer to this wild imploring cry, which Jemima half thought must force out a sign from Heaven. But there was a dawn stealing on through the darkness of her night.

It was glorious weather for the end of August. The *nights were* as full of light as the days — everywhere, *save in the* low dusky meadows by the river side

where the mists rose and blended the pale sky with the lands below. Unknowing of the care and trouble around them, Mary and Elizabeth exulted in the weather, and saw some new glory in every touch of the year's decay. They were clamorous for an expedition to the hills, before the calm stillness of the autumn should be disturbed by storms. They gained permission to go on the next Wednesday — the next half-holiday. They had won their mother over to consent to a full holiday, but their father would not hear of it. Mrs. Bradshaw had proposed an early dinner, but the idea was scouted at by the girls. What would the expedition be worth if they did not carry their dinners with them in baskets? Anything out of a basket, and eaten in the open air, was worth twenty times as much as the most sumptuous meal in the house. So the baskets were packed up, while Mrs. Bradshaw wailed over probable colds to be caught from sitting on the damp ground. Ruth and Leonard were to go; they four. Jemima had refused all invitations to make one of the party; and yet she had a half sympathy with her sisters' joy — a sort of longing, lingering look back to the time when she too would have revelled in the *prospect that lay before* them. They too would grow

up, and suffer; though now they played, regardless of their doom.

The morning was bright and glorious; just cloud enough, as some one said, to make the distant plain look beautiful from the hills, with its floating shadows passing over the golden corn-fields. Leonard was to join them at twelve, when his lessons with Mr. Benson and the girls' with their masters, should be over. Ruth took off her bonnet, and folded her shawl with her usual dainty, careful neatness, and laid them aside in a corner of the room to be in readiness. She tried to forget the pleasure she always anticipated from a long walk towards the hills, while the morning's work went on; but she showed enough of sympathy to make the girls cling round her with many a caress of joyous love. Everything was beautiful in their eyes; from the shadows of the quivering leaves on the wall to the glittering beads of dew, not yet absorbed by the sun which decked the gossamer web in the vine outside the window. Eleven o'clock struck. The Latin master went away, wondering much at the radiant faces of his pupils, and thinking that it was only very young people who could take such pleasure in the "Delectus." Ruth said, "Now, do let us try to be very steady this next

hour," and Mary pulled back Ruth's head, and gave the pretty budding mouth a kiss. They sat down to work, while Mrs. Denbigh read aloud. A fresh sun-gleam burst into the room, and they looked at each other with glad, anticipating eyes.

Jemima came in, ostensibly to seek for a book, but really from that sort of restless weariness of any one place or employment, which had taken possession of her since Mr. Farquhar's return. She stood before the bookcase in the recess, languidly passing over the titles in search of the one she wanted. Ruth's voice lost a tone or two of its peacefulness, and her eyes looked more dim and anxious at Jemima's presence. She wondered in her heart if she dared to ask Miss Bradshaw to accompany them in their expedition. Eighteen months ago she would have urged it on her friend with soft, loving entreaty; now she was afraid even to propose it as a hard possibility, everything she did or said was taken so wrongly — seemed to add to the old dislike, or the later stony contempt with which Miss Bradshaw had regarded her. While they were in this way Mr. Bradshaw came into the room. His entrance — his being at home at all at this time — was so *unusual a thing, that the* reading was instantly stopped;

and all four involuntarily looked at him, as if expecting some explanation of his unusual proceeding.

His face was almost purple with suppressed agitation.

"Mary and Elizabeth, leave the room. Don't stay to pack up your books. Leave the room, I say!" He spoke with trembling anger, and the frightened girls obeyed without a word. A cloud passing over the sun, cast a cold gloom into the room which was late so bright and beaming; but, by equalising the light, it took away the dark shadow from the place where Jemima had been standing, and her figure caught her father's eye.

"Leave the room, Jemima," said he.

"Why, father?" replied she, in an opposition that was strange even to herself, but which was prompted by the sullen passion which seethed below the stagnant surface of her life, and which sought a vent in defiance. She maintained her ground, facing round upon her father, and Ruth — Ruth, who had risen, and stood trembling, shaking, a lightning-fear having shown her the precipice on which she stood. It was of no use; no quiet, innocent life — no profound silence, even to *her own heart* as to the Past; the old offence could

never be drowned in the Deep; but thus, when all was calm on the great, broad, sunny sea, it rose to the surface, and faced her with its unclosed eyes, and its ghastly countenance. The blood bubbled up to her brain, and made such a sound there, as of boiling waters, that she did not hear the words which Mr. Bradshaw first spoke; indeed, his speech was broken and disjointed by intense passion. But she needed not to hear; she knew. As she rose up at first, so she stood now — numb and helpless. When her ears heard again (as if the sounds were drawing nearer, and becoming more distinct, from some faint, vague distance of space), Mr. Bradshaw was saying, "If there be one sin I hate — I utterly loathe — more than all others, it is wantonness. It includes all other sins. It is but of a piece that you should have come with your sickly, hypocratical face, imposing upon us all. I trust Benson did not know of it — for his own sake, I trust not. Before God, if he got you into my house on false pretences, he shall find his charity at other men's expense shall cost him dear — you — the common talk of Eccleston for your profligacy — " He was absolutely choked by his boiling indignation. Ruth stood speechless, *motionless.* Her head drooped a little forward,

her eyes were more than half veiled by the large quivering lids, her arms hung down straight and heavy. At last she heaved the weight off her heart enough to say, in a faint, moaning voice, speaking with infinite difficulty:

"I was so young."

"The more depraved, the more disgusting you," Mr. Bradshaw exclaimed, almost glad that the woman, unresisting so long, should now begin to resist. But to his surprise (for in his anger he had forgotten her presence) Jemima moved forwards, and said, "Father!"

"You hold your tongue, Jemima. You have grown more and more insolent — more and more disobedient every day. I now know who to thank for it. When such a woman came into my family there is no wonder at any corruption — any evil — any defilement —"

"Father!"

"Not a word! If, in your disobedience, you choose to stay and hear what no modest young woman would put herself in the way of hearing, you shall be silent when I bid you. The only good you can gain is in the way of warning. Look at that woman" (indicating Ruth, who moved her drooping head a little on one *side, as if by* such motion she could avert the pitiless

pointing — her face growing whiter and whiter still every instant) — "look at that woman, I say — corrupt long before she was your age — hypocrite for years! If ever you, or any child of mine, cared for her, shake her off from you, as St. Paul shook off the viper — even into the fire." He stopped for very want of breath. Jemima, all flushed and panting, went up and stood side by side with wan Ruth. She took the cold, dead hand which hung next to her in her warm convulsive grasp, and, holding it so tight, that it was blue and discoloured for days, she spoke out beyond all power of restraint from her father.

"Father! I will speak. I will not keep silence. I will bear witness to Ruth. I have hated her — so keenly, may God forgive me! but you may know, from that, that my witness is true. I have hated her, and my hatred was only quenched into contempt — not contempt now, dear Ruth — dear Ruth" — (this was spoken with infinite softness and tenderness, and in spite of her father's fierce eyes and passionate gesture) — "I heard what you have learnt now, father, weeks and weeks ago — a year it may be, all time of late has been so long; and I shuddered up from her *and from her sin;* and I might have spoken of it, and

told it there and then, if I had not been afraid that it was from no good motive I should act in so doing, but to gain a way to the desire of my own jealous heart. Yes, father, to show you what a witness I am for Ruth, I will own that I was stabbed to the heart with jealousy; some one — some one cared for Ruth that — oh, father! spare me saying all." Her face was double-dyed with crimson blushes, and she paused for one moment — no more.

"I watched her, and I watched her with my wild-beast eyes. If I had seen one paltering with duty — if I had witnessed one flickering shadow of untruth in word or action — if, more than all things, my woman's instinct had ever been conscious of the faintest speck of impurity in thought, or word, or look, my old hate would have flamed out with the flame of hell! my contempt would have turned to loathing disgust, instead of my being full of pity, and the stirrings of new-awakened love, and most true respect. Father, I have borne my witness!"

"And I will tell you how much your witness is worth," said her father, beginning low, that his pent-up wrath might have room to swell out. "It only *convinces* me more and more how deep is the corrup-

tion this wanton has spread in my family. She has come amongst us with her innocent seeming, and spread her nets well and skilfully. She has turned right into wrong, and wrong into right, and taught you all to be uncertain whether there be any such thing as Vice in the world, or whether it ought not to be looked upon as virtue. She has led you to the brink of the deep pit, ready for the first chance circumstance to push you in. And I trusted her — I trusted her — I welcomed her."

"I have done very wrong," murmured Ruth, but so low, that perhaps he did not hear her, for he went on, lashing himself up.

"I welcomed her. I was duped into allowing her bastard — (I sicken at the tought of it) —"

At the mention of Leonard, Ruth lifted up her eyes for the first time since the conversation began, the pupils dilating, as if she were just becoming aware of some new agony in store for her. I have seen such a look of terror on a poor dumb animal's countenance, and once or twice on human faces. I pray I may never see it again on either! Jemima felt the hand she held in her *strong* grasp writhe itself free. Ruth *spread her arms before* her, clasping and lacing her

fingers together, her head thrown a little back, as if in intensest suffering.

Mr. Bradshaw went on:

"That very child and heir of shame to associate with my own innocent children! I trust they are not contaminated."

"I cannot bear it — I cannot bear it," were the words wrung out of Ruth.

"Cannot bear it! cannot bear it!" he repeated. "You must bear it, Madam. Do you suppose your child is to be exempt from the penalties of his birth? Do you suppose that he alone is to be saved from the upbraiding scoff? Do you suppose that he is ever to rank with other boys, who are not stained and marked with sin from their birth? Every creature in Eccleston may know what he is, do you think they will spare him their scorn? 'Cannot bear it,' indeed! Before you went into your sin, you should have thought whether you could bear the consequences or not — have had some idea how far your offspring would be degraded and scouted, till the best thing that could happen to him would be for him to be lost to all sense of shame, *dead to all* knowledge of guilt, for his mother's sake."

Ruth spoke out. She stood like a wild creature

at bay, past fear now. "I appeal to God against such a doom for my child. I appeal to God to help me. I am a mother, and as such I cry to God for help — for help to keep my boy in His pitying sight, and to bring him up in His holy fear. Let the shame fall on me! I have deserved it, but he — he is so innocent and good."

Ruth had caught up her shawl, and was tying on her bonnet with her trembling hands. What if Leonard was hearing of her shame from common report? What would be the mysterious shock of the intelligence? She must face him, and see the look in his eyes, before she knew whether he recoiled from her; he might have his heart turned to hate her, by their cruel jeers.

Jemima stood by, dumb and pitying. Her sorrow was past her power. She helped in arranging the dress, with one or two gentle touches, which were hardly felt by Ruth, but which called out all Mr. Bradshaw's ire afresh; he absolutely took her by the shoulders and turned her by force out of the room. In the hall, and along the stairs, her passionate woeful crying was heard. The sound only concentrated Mr. Bradshaw's anger on Ruth. He held the street door open wide; and said, between his teeth, "If ever you,

or your bastard, darken this door again, I will have you both turned out by the police."

He needed not have added this, if he had seen Ruth's face.

CHAPTER V.

As Ruth went along the accustomed streets, every sight and every sound seemed to bear a new meaning, and each and all to have some reference to her boy's disgrace. She held her head down, and scudded along dizzy with fear, lest some word should have told him what she had been, and what he was, before she could reach him. It was a wild unreasoning fear, but it took hold of her as strongly as if it had been well founded. And, indeed, the secret whispered by Mrs. Pearson, whose curiosity and suspicion had been excited by Jemima's manner, and confirmed since by many a little corroborating circumstance, had spread abroad, and was known to most of the gossips in Eccleston before it reached Mr. Bradshaw's ears.

As Ruth came up to the door of the Chapel-house, it was opened, and Leonard came out, bright and hopeful as the morning, his face radiant at the prospect of the happy day before him. He was dressed *in the clothes it had* been such a pleasant pride to

her to make for him. He had the dark blue ribbon tied round his neck that she had left out for him that very morning, with a smiling thought of how it would set off his brown handsome face. She caught him by the hand as they met, and turned him, with his face homewards, without a word. Her looks, her rushing movement, her silence, awed him; and although he wondered, he did not stay to ask why she did so. The door was on the latch; she opened it, and only said, "Up-stairs," in a hoarse whisper. Up they went into her own room. She drew him in, and bolted the door; and then, sitting down, she placed him (she had never let go of him) before her, holding him with her hands on each of his shoulders, and gazing into his face with a woeful look of the agony that could not find vent in words. At last she tried to speak; she tried with strong bodily effort, almost amounting to convulsion. But the words would not come; it was not till she saw the absolute terror depicted on his face that she found utterance; and then the sight of that terror changed the words from what she meant them to have been. She drew him to her, and laid her head upon his shoulder; hiding her face even *there.*

"My poor, poor boy! my poor, poor darling! Oh! would that I had died — I had died, in my innocent girlhood!"

"Mother! mother!" sobbed Leonard. "What is the matter? Why do you look so wild and ill? Why do you call me your 'poor boy?' Are we not going to Scaurside-hill? I don't much mind it, mother; only please don't gasp and quiver so. Dearest mother, are you ill? Let me call Aunt Faith!"

Ruth lifted herself up, and put away the hair that had fallen over and was blinding her eyes. She looked at him with intense wistfulness.

"Kiss me, Leonard!" said she — "kiss me, my darling, once more in the old way!" Leonard threw himself into her arms, and hugged her with all his force, and their lips clung together as in the kiss given to the dying.

"Leonard!" said she at length, holding him away from her, and nerving herself up to tell him all by one spasmodic effort — "Listen to me." The boy stood breathless and still, gazing at her. On her impetuous transit from Mr. Bradshaw's to the Chapel-house, her wild desperate thought had been that she *would call herself by* every violent, coarse name which

the world might give her — that Leonard should hear those words applied to his mother first from her own lips; but the influence of his presence — for he was a holy and sacred creature in her eyes, and this point remained steadfast, though all the rest were upheaved — subdued her; and now it seemed as if she could not find words fine enough, and pure enough, to convey the truth that he must learn, and should learn from no tongue but hers.

"Leonard — when I was very young I did very wrong. I think God, who knows all, will judge me more tenderly than men — but I did wrong in a way which you cannot understand yet" (she saw the red flush come into his cheek, and it stung her as the first token of that shame which was to be his portion through life) — "in a way people never forget, never forgive. You will hear me called the hardest names that ever can be thrown at women — I have been, to-day; and, my child, you must bear it patiently, because they will be partly true. Never get confused, by your love for me, into thinking that what I did was right. — Where was I?" said she, suddenly faltering, and forgetting all she had said and all she had got to say; *and then*, seeing Leonard's face of wonder, and burn-

ing shame and indignation, she went on more rapidly, as fearing lest her strength should fail before she had ended.

"And Leonard," continued she, in a trembling, sad voice, "this is not all. The punishment of punishments lies awaiting me still. It is to see you suffer for my wrong-doing. Yes, darling! they will speak shameful things of you, poor innocent child, as well as of me, who am guilty. They will throw it in your teeth through life, that your mother was never married — was not married when you were born —"

"Were not you married? Are not you a widow?" asked he abruptly, for the first time getting anything like a clear idea of the real state of the case.

"No! May God forgive me, and help me!" exclaimed she, as she saw a strange look of repugnance cloud over the boy's face, and felt a slight motion on his part to extricate himself from her hold. It was as slight, as transient as it could be — over in an instant. But she had taken her hands away, and covered up her face with them as quickly — covered up her face in shame before her child; and in the bitterness of her heart she was wailing out, "Oh, would to God *I had died* — *that* I had died as a baby — that I

had died as a little baby hanging at my mother's breast!"

"Mother," said Leonard, timidly putting his hand on her arm; but she shrunk from him, and continued her low, passionate wailing. "Mother," said he, after a pause, coming nearer, though she saw it not — "mammy darling," said he, using the caressing name, which he had been trying to drop as not sufficiently manly, "mammy, my own, own dear, dear, darling mother, I don't believe them — I don't, I don't, I don't, I don't!" He broke out into a wild burst of crying, as he said this. In a moment her arms were round the poor boy, and she was hushing him up like a baby on her bosom. "Hush, Leonard! Leonard, be still, my child! I have been too sudden with you! — I have done you harm — oh! I have done you nothing but harm," cried she, in a tone of bitter self-reproach.

"No, mother!" said he, stopping his tears, and his eyes blazing out with earnestness, "there never was such a mother as you have been to me, and I *won't believe* any one who says it. I won't; and I'll *knock them* down if they say it again, I will!" He

clenched his fist, with a fierce defiant look on his face.

"You forget, my child," said Ruth, in the sweetest, saddest tone that ever was heard, "I said it of myself; I said it because it was true." Leonard threw his arms tight round her, and hid his face against her bosom. She felt him pant there like some hunted creature. She had no soothing comfort to give him. "Oh, that she and he lay dead!"

At last, exhausted, he lay so still and motionless, that she feared to look. She wanted him to speak, yet dreaded his first words. She kissed his hair, his head, his very clothes; murmuring low inarticulate moaning sounds.

"Leonard," said she, "Leonard, look up at me! Leonard, look up!" But he only clung the closer, and hid his face the more.

"My boy!" said she, "what can I do or say? If I tell you never to mind it — that it is nothing — I tell you false. It is a bitter shame and a sorrow that I have drawn down upon you. A shame, Leonard, because of me, your *mother; but*, Leonard, it is no disgrace or *lowering of you in* the eyes of God." She spoke now

as if she had found the clue which might lead him to rest and strength at last. "Remember that, always. Remember that, when the time of trial comes — and it seems a hard and cruel thing that you should be called reproachful names by men, and all for what was no fault of yours — remember God's pity and God's justice; and though my sin shall have made you an outcast in the world — oh, my child, my child!" — (she felt him kiss her, as if mutely trying to comfort her — it gave her strength to go on) — "remember, darling of my heart, it is only your own sin that can make you an outcast from God."

She grew so faint that her hold of him relaxed. He looked up affrighted. He brought her water — he threw it over her; in his terror at the notion that she was going to die and leave him, he called her by every fond name, imploring her to open her eyes.

When she partially recovered, he helped her to the bed, on which she lay still, wan and death-like. She almost hoped the swoon that hung around her might be Death, and in that imagination she opened her eyes to take a last look at her boy. She saw him pale and *terror-stricken*; and pity for his affright roused her,

and made her forget herself in the wish that he should not see her death, if she were indeed dying.

"Go to Aunt Faith!" whispered she; "I am weary, and want sleep."

Leonard arose slowly and reluctantly. She tried to smile upon him, that what she thought would be her last look might dwell in his remembrance as tender and strong; she watched him to the door, she saw him hesitate, and return to her. He came back to her, and said in a timid, apprehensive tone:

"Mother — will *they* speak to me about — it?"

Ruth closed her eyes, that they might not express the agony she felt, like a sharp knife, at this question. Leonard had asked it with a child's desire of avoiding painful and mysterious topics, — from no personal sense of shame as she understood it, shame beginning thus early, thus instantaneously.

"No," she replied. "You may be sure they will not."

So he went. But now she would have been thankful for the unconsciousness of fainting; that one little speech bore so much meaning to her hot irritable brain. Mr. and Miss Benson, all in their house, *would never speak to* the boy — but in his home

alone would he be safe from what he had already learnt to dread. Every form in which shame and opprobrium could overwhelm her darling, haunted her. She had been exercising strong self-control for his sake ever since she had met him at the house-door; there was now a re-action. His presence had kept her mind on its perfect balance. When that was withdrawn, the effect of the strain of power was felt. And athwart the fever-mists that arose to obscure her judgment, all sorts of will-o'-the-wisp plans flittered before her; tempting her to this and that course of action — to anything rather than patient endurance — to relieve her present state of misery by some sudden spasmodic effort, that took the semblance of being wise and right. Gradually all her desires, all her longing, settled themselves on one point. What had she done — what could she do, to Leonard, but evil? If she were away, and gone no one knew where — lost in mystery, as if she were dead — perhaps the cruel hearts might reflect, and show pity on Leonard; while her perpetual presence would but call up the remembrance of his birth. Thus she reasoned in her hot dull brain; and shaped her plans in accordance.

Leonard stole down-stairs noiselessly. He listened

to find some quiet place where he could hide himself. The house was very still. Miss Benson thought the purposed expedition had taken place, and never dreamed but that Ruth and Leonard were on distant sunny Scaurside-hill; and after a very early dinner, she had set out to drink tea with a farmer's wife who lived in the country two or three miles off. Mr. Benson meant to have gone with her; but while they were at dinner, he had received an unusually authoritative note from Mr. Bradshaw desiring to speak with him, so he went to that gentleman's house instead. Sally was busy in her kitchen, making a great noise (not unlike a groom rubbing down a horse) over her cleaning. Leonard stole into the sitting-room, and crouched behind the large old-fashioned sofa to ease his sore, aching heart, by crying with all the prodigal waste and abandonment of childhood.

Mr. Benson was shown into Mr. Bradshaw's own particular room. The latter gentleman was walking up and down, and it was easy to perceive that something had occurred to chafe him to great anger.

"Sit down, Sir!" said he to Mr. Benson, nodding to a chair.

Mr. Benson sat down. But Mr. Bradshaw continued

his walk for a few minutes longer without speaking. Then he stopped abruptly, right in front of Mr. Benson; and in a voice which he tried to render calm, but which trembled with passion — with a face glowing purple as he thought of his wrongs (and real wrongs they were) he began:

"Mr. Benson, I have sent for you to ask — I am almost too indignant at the bare suspicion to speak as becomes me — but did you — I really shall be obliged to beg your pardon, if you are as much in the dark as I was yesterday, as to the character of that woman who lives under your roof?"

There was no answer from Mr. Benson. Mr. Bradshaw looked at him very earnestly. His eyes were fixed on the ground — he made no inquiry — he uttered no expression of wonder or dismay. Mr. Bradshaw ground his foot on the floor with gathering rage; but, just as he was about to speak, Mr. Benson rose up — a poor deformed old man — before the stern and portly figure that was swelling and panting with passion.

"Hear me, Sir!" (stretching out his hand as if to avert the words which were impending.) "Nothing *you can say*, can upbraid me like my own conscience;

no degradation you can inflict, by word or deed, can come up to the degradation I have suffered for years, at being a party to a deceit, even for a good end —"

"For a good end! — Nay! what next?"

The taunting contempt with which Mr. Bradshaw spoke these words, almost surprised himself by what he imagined must be its successful power of withering; but in spite of it, Mr. Benson lifted his grave eyes to Mr. Bradshaw's countenance, and repeated:

"For a good end. The end was not, as perhaps you consider it to have been, to obtain her admission into your family — nor yet to put her in the way of gaining her livelihood; my sister and I would willingly have shared what we have with her; it was our intention to do so at first, if not for any length of time, at least as long as her health might require it. Why I advised (perhaps I only yielded to advice) a change of name — an assumption of a false state of widowhood — was because I earnestly desired to place her in circumstances in which she might work out her self-redemption; and you, Sir, know how terribly the world goes against all such as have sinned as Ruth did. She *was so young, too.*"

"You mistake, Sir; my acquaintance has not lain so much among that class of sinners as to give me much experience of the way in which they are treated. But, judging from what I have seen, I should say they meet with full as much leniency as they deserve; and supposing they do not — I know there are plenty of sickly sentimentalists just now who reserve all their interest and regard for criminals — why not pick out one of these to help you in your task of washing the blackamoor white? Why choose me to be imposed upon — my household into which to intrude your *protégée?* Why were my innocent children to be exposed to corruption? I say," said Mr. Bradshaw, stamping his foot, "how dared you come into this house, where you were looked upon as a minister of religion, with a lie in your mouth? How dared you single me out, of all people, to be gulled and deceived, and pointed at through the town as the person who had taken an abandoned woman into his house to teach his daughters?"

"I own my deceit was wrong and faithless."

"Yes! you can own it, now it is found out! There is small merit in that, I think!

"*Sir! I* claim no merit. I take shame to myself

I did not single you out. You applied to me with your proposal that Ruth should be your children's governess."

"Pah!"

"And the temptation was too great — No! I will not say that — but the temptation was greater than I could stand — it seemed to open out a path of usefulness."

"Now, don't let me hear you speak so," said Mr. Bradshaw, blazing up. "I can't stand it. It is too much to talk in that way when the usefulness was to consist in contaminating my innocent girls."

"God knows that if I had believed there had been any danger of such contamination — God knows how I would have died sooner than have allowed her to enter your family. Mr. Bradshaw, you believe me, don't you?" asked Mr. Benson, earnestly.

"I really must be allowed the privilege of doubting what you say in future," said Mr. Bradshaw, in a cold, contemptuous manner.

"I have deserved this," Mr. Benson replied. "But," continued he, after a moment's pause, "I will not speak of myself, but of Ruth. Surely, Sir, the end I aimed at (the means I took to obtain it were wrong, you

cannot feel that more than I do) was a right one; and you will not — you cannot say, that your children have suffered from associating with her. I had her in my family, under the watchful eyes of three anxious persons for a year or more; we saw faults — no human being is without them — and poor Ruth's were but slight venial errors; but we saw no sign of a corrupt mind — no glimpse of boldness or forwardness — no token of want of conscientiousness; she seemed, and was, a young and gentle girl, who had been led astray before she fairly knew what life was."

"I suppose most depraved women have been innocent in their time," said Mr. Bradshaw, with bitter contempt.

"Oh, Mr. Bradshaw! Ruth was not depraved, and you know it. You cannot have seen her — have known her daily, all these years, without acknowledging that!" Mr. Benson was almost breathless, awaiting Mr. Bradshaw's answer. The quiet self-control which he had maintained so long, was gone now.

"I saw her daily — I did *not* know her. If I had known her, I should have known she was fallen and depraved, and consequently not fit to come into my *house, nor* to associate with my pure children."

"Now I wish God would give me power to speak out convincingly what I believe to be His truth, that not every woman who has fallen is depraved; that many — how many the Great Judgment Day will reveal to those who have shaken off the poor, sore, penitent hearts on earth — many, many crave and hunger after a chance for virtue — the help which no man gives to them — help — that gentle tender help which Jesus gave once to Mary Magdelen." Mr. Benson was almost choked by his own feelings.

"Come, come, Mr. Benson, let us have no more of this morbid way of talking. The world has decided how such women are to be treated; and, you may depend upon it, there is so much practical wisdom in the world that its way of acting is right in the long run, and that no one can fly in its face with impunity, unless, indeed, they stoop to deceit and imposition."

"I take my stand with Christ against the world," said Mr. Benson, solemnly, disregarding the covert allusion to himself. "What have the world's ways ended in? Can we be much worse than we are?"

"Speak for yourself, if you please."

"Is it not time to change some of our ways of *thinking and acting?* I declare before God, that if I

believe in any one human truth, it is this — that to every woman, who, like Ruth, has sinned, should be given a chance of self-redemption — and that such a chance should be given in no supercilious or contemptuous manner, but in the spirit of the holy Christ."

"Such as getting her into a friend's house under false colours."

"I do not argue on Ruth's case. In that I have acknowledged my error. I do not argue on any case. I state my firm belief, that it is God's will that we should not dare to trample any of His creatures down to the hopeless dust; that it is God's will that the women who have fallen should be numbered among those who have broken hearts to be bound up, not cast aside as lost beyond recal. If this be God's will, as a thing of God it will stand; and He will open a way."

"I should have attached much more importance to all your exhortation on this point, if I could have respected your conduct in other matters. As it is, when I see a man who has deluded himself into considering falsehood right, I am disinclined to take his opinion *on subjects* connected with morality; and I can no

longer regard him as a fitting exponent of the will of God. You perhaps understand what I mean, Mr. Benson. I can no longer attend your chapel."

If Mr. Benson had felt any hope of making Mr. Bradshaw's obstinate mind receive the truth, that he acknowledged and repented of his connivance at the falsehood by means of which Ruth had been received into the Bradshaw family, this last sentence prevented his making the attempt. He simply bowed and took his leave — Mr. Bradshaw attending him to the door with formal ceremony.

He felt acutely the severance of the tie which Mr. Bradshaw had just announced to him. He had experienced many mortifications in his intercourse with that gentleman, but they had fallen off from his meek spirit like drops of water from a bird's plumage; and now he only remembered the acts of substantial kindness rendered (the ostentation all forgotten) — many happy hours and pleasant evenings — the children whom he had loved dearer than he thought till now — the young people about whom he had cared, and whom he had striven to lead aright. He was but a young man when Mr. Bradshaw first came to his chapel; they *had grown old* together; he had never recognised

Mr. Bradshaw as an old familiar friend so completely, as now when they were severed.

It was with a heavy heart that he opened his own door. He went to his study immediately; he sat down to steady himself into his position.

How long he was there — silent and alone — reviewing his life — confessing his sins — he did not know; but he heard some unusual sound in the house that disturbed him — roused him to present life. A slow, languid step came along the passage to the front door — the breathing was broken by many sighs.

Ruth's hand was on the latch when Mr. Benson came out. Her face was very white, except two red spots on each cheek — her eyes were deep sunk and hollow, but glittered with feverish lustre. "Ruth!" exclaimed he. She moved her lips, but her throat and mouth were too dry for her to speak.

"Where are you going?" asked he; for she had all her walking things on, yet trembled so, even as she stood, that it was evident she could not walk far without falling.

She hesitated — she looked up at him, still with *the same* dry glittering eyes. At last she whispered

(for she could only speak in a whisper), "To Helmsby — I am going to Helmsby."

"Helmsby! my poor girl — may God have mercy upon you!" for he saw she hardly knew what she was saying. "Where is Helmsby?"

"I don't know. In Lincolnshire, I think."

"But why are you going there?"

"Hush! he 's asleep," said she, as Mr. Benson had unconsciously raised his voice.

"Who is asleep?" asked Mr. Benson.

"That poor little boy," said she, beginning to quiver and cry.

"Come here!" said he, authoritatively, drawing her into the study.

"Sit down in that chair. I will come back directly."

He went in search of his sister, but she had not returned. Then he had recourse to Sally, who was as busy as ever about her cleaning.

"How long has Ruth been at home?" asked he.

"Ruth! She has never been at home sin' morning. She and Leonard were to be off for the day somewhere or *other with* them Bradshaw girls."

"*Then she has* had no dinner?"

"Not here, any rate. I can't answer for what she may have done at other places."

"And Leonard — where is he?"

"How should I know? With his mother, I suppose. Leastways, that was what was fixed on. I've enough to do of my own, without routing after other folks."

She went on scouring in no very good temper. Mr. Benson stood silent for a moment.

"Sally," he said, "I want a cup of tea. Will you make it as soon as you can; and some dry toast too. I'll come for it in ten minutes."

Struck by something in his voice, she looked up at him for the first time.

"What ha' ye been doing to yourself, to look so grim and grey. Tiring yourself all to tatters, looking after some naught, I'll be bound! Well! well! I mun make ye your tea, I reckon; but I did hope as you grew older you'd ha' grown wiser!"

Mr. Benson made no reply, but went to look for Leonard, hoping that the child's presence might bring back to his mother the power of self-control. He opened the parlour-door, and looked in, but saw no one. *Just* as he was shutting it, however, he heard a *deep*, broken, sobbing sigh; and, guided by the

sound, he found the boy lying on the floor, fast asleep, but with his features all swollen and disfigured by passionate crying.

"Poor child! This was what she meant, then," thought Mr. Benson. "He has begun his share of the sorrows too," he continued, pitifully. "No! I will not waken him back to consciousness. So he returned alone into the study. Ruth sat where he had placed her, her head bent back, and her eyes shut. But when he came in she started up.

"I must be going," she said, in a hurried way.

"Nay, Ruth, you must not go. You must not leave us. We cannot do without you. We love you too much."

"Love me!" said she, looking at him wistfully. As she looked, her eyes filled slowly with tears. It was a good sign, and Mr. Benson took heart to go on.

"Yes! Ruth. You know we do. You may have other things to fill up your mind just now, but you know we love you; and nothing can alter our love for you. You ought not to have thought of leaving us. You would not, if you had been quite well."

"Do you know what has happened?" she asked, *in a low, hoarse voice.*

"Yes. I know all," he answered. "It makes no difference to us. Why should it?"

"Oh! Mr. Benson, don't you know that my shame is discovered?" she replied, bursting into tears — "and I must leave you, and leave Leonard, that you may not share in my disgrace."

"You must do no such thing. Leave Leonard! You have no right to leave Leonard. Where could you go to?"

"To Helmsby," she said, humbly. "It would break my heart to go, but I think I ought, for Leonard's sake. I know I ought." She was crying sadly by this time, but Mr. Benson knew the flow of tears would ease her brain. "It will break my heart to go, but I know I must."

"Sit still here at present," said he, in a decided tone of command. He went for the cup of tea. He brought it to her without Sally's being aware for whom it was intended.

"Drink this!" He spoke as you would do to a child, if desiring it to take medicine. "Eat some toast." She took the tea, and drank it feverishly; but when she tried to eat, the food seemed to choke her. *Still she was* docile, and she tried.

"I cannot," said she at last, putting down the piece of toast. There was a return to something of her usual tone in the words. She spoke gently and softly; no longer in the shrill, hoarse voice she had used at first. Mr. Benson sat down by her.

"Now, Ruth, we must talk a little together. I want to understand what your plan was. Where is Helmsby? Why did you fix to go there?"

"It is where my mother lived," she answered. "Before she was married she lived there; and wherever she lived, the people all loved her dearly; and I thought — I think, that for her sake some one would give me work. I meant to tell them the truth," said she, dropping her eyes; "but still they would, perhaps, give me some employment — I don't care what — for her sake. I could do many things," said she, suddenly looking up. "I am sure I could weed — I could in gardens — if they did not like to have me in their houses. But perhaps some one, for my mother's sake — oh! my dear, dear mother! — do you know where and what I am?" she cried out, sobbing afresh.

Mr. Benson's heart was very sore, though he spoke authoritatively, and almost sternly.

"*Ruth! you must* be still and quiet. I cannot have

this. I want you to listen to me. Your thought of Helmsby would be a good one, if it was right for you to leave Eccleston; but I do not think it is. I am certain of this, that it would be a great sin in you to separate yourself from Leonard. You have no right to sever the tie by which God has bound you together."

"But if I am here they will all know and remember the shame of his birth; and if I go away they may forget —"

"And they may not. And if you go away, he may be unhappy or ill; and you, who above all others have — and have from God — remember *that*, Ruth! — the power to comfort him, the tender patience to nurse him, have left him to the care of strangers. Yes; I know! But we ourselves are as strangers, dearly as we love him, compared to a mother. He may turn to sin, and want the long forbearance, the serene authority of a parent; and where are you? No dread of shame, either for yourself, or even for him, can ever make it right for you to shake off your responsibility." All this time he was watching her narrowly, and saw her slowly yield herself up to the force of what he *was saying.*

"Besides, Ruth," he continued, "we have gone on falsely hitherto. It has been my doing, my mistake, my sin. I ought to have known better. Now, let us stand firm on the truth. You have no new fault to repent of. Be brave and faithful. It is to God you answer, not to men. The shame of having your sin known to the world, should be as nothing to the shame you felt at having sinned. We have dreaded men too much, and God too little, in the course we have taken. But now be of good cheer. Perhaps you will have to find your work in the world very low — not quite working in the fields," said he, with a gentle smile, to which she, downcast and miserable, could give no response. "Nay, perhaps, Ruth," he went on, "you may have to stand and wait for some time; no one may be willing to use the services you would gladly render; all may turn aside from you, and may speak very harshly of you. Can you accept all this treatment meekly, as but the reasonable and just penance God has laid upon you — feeling no anger against those who slight you, no impatience for the time to come (and come it surely will — I speak as having the word of God for what I say) when He, having *purified you,* even as by fire, will make a straight path

for your feet? My child, it is Christ the Lord who has told us of this infinite mercy of God. Have you faith enough in it to be brave, and bear on, and do rightly in patience and in tribulation?"

Ruth had been hushed and very still until now, when the pleading earnestness of his question urged her to answer:

"Yes!" said she. "I hope — I believe I can be faithful for myself, for I have sinned and done wrong. But Leonard — " She looked up at him.

"But Leonard," he echoed. "Ah! there it is hard, Ruth. I own the world is hard and persecuting to such as he." He paused to think of the true comfort for this sting. He went on. "The world is not everything; Ruth; nor is the want of men's good opinion and esteem the highest need which man has. Teach Leonard this. You would not wish his life to be one summer's day. You dared not make it so, if you had the power. Teach him to bid a noble, Christian welcome, to the trials which God sends — and this is one of them. Teach him not to look on a life of struggle' and perhaps of disappointment and incompleteness, as a sad and mournful end, but as the means permitted to the heroes and warriors in the army of Christ, by

which to show their faithful following. Tell him of the hard and thorny path which was trodden once by the bleeding feet of One. Ruth! think of the Saviour's life and cruel death, and of his divine faithfulness. Oh, Ruth!" exclaimed he, "when I look and see what you may be — what you *must* be to that boy, I cannot think how you could be coward enough, for a moment, to shrink from your work! But we have all been cowards hitherto," he added, in bitter self-accusation. "God help us to be so no longer!"

Ruth sat very quiet. Her eyes were fixed on the ground, and she seemed lost in thought. At length she rose up.

"Mr. Benson!" said she, standing before him, and propping herself by the table, as she was trembling sadly from weakness, "I mean to try very, very hard, to do my duty to Leonard — and to God," she added, reverently. "I am only afraid my faith may sometimes fail about Leonard —"

"Ask, and it shall be given unto you. That is no vain or untried promise, Ruth!"

She sat down again, unable longer to stand. There was another long silence.

"I must never go to Mr. Bradshaw's again," she *said at last, as if thinking* aloud.

"No, Ruth, you shall not," he answered.

"But I shall earn no money!" added she, quickly, for she thought that he did not perceive the difficulty that was troubling her.

"You surely know, Ruth, that while Faith and I have a roof to shelter us, or bread to eat, you and Leonard share it with us."

"I know — I know your most tender goodness," said she, "but it ought not to be."

"It must be at present," he said, in a decided manner. "Perhaps, before long you may have some employment; perhaps it may be some time before an opportunity occurs."

"Hush," said Ruth; "Leonard is moving about in the parlour. I must go to him."

But when she stood up, she turned so dizzy, and tottered so much, that she was glad to sit down again immediately.

"You must rest here. I will go to him," said Mr. Benson. He left her; and when he was gone, she leaned her head on the back of the chair, and cried quietly and incessantly; but there was a more patient, hopeful, resolved feeling in her heart, which *all along*, through all the tears she shed, bore her

onwards to higher thoughts, until at last she rose to prayers.

Mr. Benson caught the new look of shrinking shame in Leonard's eye, as it first sought, then shunned, meeting his. He was pained, too, by the sight of the little sorrowful, anxious face, on which, until now, hope and joy had been predominant. The constrained voice, the few words the boy spoke, when formerly there would have been a glad and free utterance — all this grieved Mr. Benson inexpressibly, as but the beginning of an unwonted mortification, which must last for years. He himself made no allusion to any unusual occurrence; he spoke of Ruth as sitting, overcome by headache, in the study for quietness: he hurried on the preparations for tea, while Leonard sat by in the great arm-chair, and looked on with sad dreamy eyes. He strove to lessen the shock which he knew Leonard had received, by every mixture of tenderness and cheerfulness that Mr. Benson's gentle heart prompted; and now and then a languid smile stole over the boy's face. When his bedtime came, Mr. Benson told him of the hour, although he feared that Leonard would have but another sorrowful crying of himself to sleep; *but he was* anxious to accustom the boy to

cheerful movement within the limits of domestic law, and by no disobedience to it to weaken the power of glad submission to the Supreme; to begin the new life that lay before him, where strength to look up to God as the Law-giver and Ruler of events would be pre-eminently required. When Leonard had gone up-stairs, Mr. Benson went immediately to Ruth, and said,

"Ruth! Leonard is just gone up to bed," secure in the instinct which made her silently rise, and go up to the boy — certain, too, that they would each be the other's best comforter, and that God would strengthen each through the other.

Now, for the first time, he had leisure to think of himself; and to go over all the events of the day. The half hour of solitude in his study, that he had before his sister's return, was of inestimable value; he had leisure to put events in their true places, as to importance and eternal significance.

Miss Faith came in laden with farm produce. Her kind entertainers had brought her in their shandry to the opening of the court in which the Chapel-house stood; but she was so heavily burdened with eggs, mushrooms, and plums, that when her brother opened *the door she* was almost breathless.

"Oh, Thurstan! take this basket — it is such a weight! Oh, Sally, is that you? Here are some magnum-bonums which we must preserve to-morrow. There are guinea-fowl eggs in that basket."

Mr. Benson let her unburden her body, and her mind too, by giving charges to Sally respecting her housekeeping treasures, before he said a word; but when she returned into the study, to tell him the small pieces of intelligence respecting her day at the farm, she stood aghast.

"Why, Thurstan, dear! What 's the matter? Is your back hurting you?"

He smiled to reassure her; but it was a sickly and forced smile.

"No, Faith! I am quite well, only rather out of spirits, and wanting to talk to you to cheer me."

Miss Faith sat down, straight, sitting bolt-upright to listen the better.

"I don't know how, but the real story about Ruth is found out."

"Oh, Thurstan!" exclaimed Miss Benson, turning quite white.

For a moment, neither of them said another word. *Then she went on.*

"Does Mr. Bradshaw know?"

"Yes! He sent for me, and told me."

"Does Ruth know that it has all come out?"

"Yes. And Leonard knows."

"How? Who told him?"

"I do not know. I have asked no questions. But of course it was his mother."

"She was very foolish and cruel, then," said Miss Benson, her eyes blazing, and her lips trembling, at the thought of the suffering her darling boy must have gone through.

"I think she was wise. I am sure it was not cruel. He must have soon known that there was some mystery, and it was better that it should be told him openly and quietly by his mother than by a stranger."

"How could she tell him quietly?" asked Miss Benson, still indignant.

"Well! perhaps I used the wrong word — of course no one was by — and I don't suppose even they themselves could now tell how it was told, or in what spirit it was borne."

Miss Benson was silent again.

"*Was* Mr. Bradshaw very angry?"

"Yes, very; and justly so. I did very wrong in making that false statement at first."

"No! I am sure you did not," said Miss Faith. "Ruth has had some years of peace, in which to grow stronger and wiser, so that she can bear her shame now in a way she never could have done at first."

"All the same it was wrong in me to do what I did."

"I did it too, as much or more than you. And I don't think it wrong. I'm certain it was quite right, and I would do just the same again."

"Perhaps it has not done you the harm it has done me."

"Nonsense! Thurstan. Don't be morbid. I'm sure you are as good — and better than ever you were."

"No, I am not. I have got what you call morbid just in consequence of the sophistry by which I persuaded myself that wrong could be right. I torment myself. I have lost my clear instincts of conscience. Formerly, if I believed that such or such an action was according to the will of God, I went and did it, or at least I tried to do it, without thinking of consequences. Now, I reason and weigh what will happen

if I do so and so — I grope where formerly I saw. Oh, Faith! it is such a relief to me to have the truth known, that I am afraid I have not been sufficiently sympathising with Ruth."

"Poor Ruth!" said Miss Benson. "But at any rate our telling a lie has been the saving of her. There is no fear of her going wrong now."

"God's omnipotence did not need our sin."

They did not speak for some time.

"You have not told me what Mr. Bradshaw said."

"One can't remember the exact words that are spoken on either side in moments of such strong excitement. He was very angry, and said some things about me that were very just, and some about Ruth that were very hard. His last words were that he should give up coming to chapel."

"Oh, Thurstan! did it come to that?"

"Yes."

"Does Ruth know all he said?"

"No! Why should she? I don't know if she knows he has spoken to me at all. Poor creature! she has enough to craze her almost without that! She was for going away and leaving us that we might not share *in her disgrace*. I was afraid of her being quite d

lirious. I did so want you, Faith! However, I did the best I could, I spoke to her very coldly, and almost sternly, all the while my heart was bleeding for her. I dared not give her sympathy; I tried to give her strength. But I did so want you, Faith."

"And I was so full of enjoyment, I am ashamed to think of it. But the Dawsons are so kind — and the day was so fine — Where is Ruth now?"

"With Leonard. He is her great earthly motive — I thought that being with him would be best. But he must be in bed and asleep now."

"I will go up to her," said Miss Faith.

She found Ruth keeping watch by Leonard's troubled sleep; but when she saw Miss Faith she rose up, and threw herself on her neck and clung to her, without speaking. After a while Miss Benson said:

"You must go to bed, Ruth!" So, after she had kissed the sleeping boy, Miss Benson led her away, and helped to undress her, and brought her up a cup of soothing violet-tea — not so soothing as tender actions, and soft loving tones.

CHAPTER VI.

It was well they had so early and so tru strengthened the spirit to bear, for the events whi had to be endured soon came thick and threefold.

Every evening Mr. and Miss Benson thought t worst must be over; and every day brought some fre occurrence to touch upon the raw place. They cou not be certain, until they had seen their acquaintanc what difference it would make in the cordiality of th reception: in some cases it made much; and Miss Be son was proportionably indignant. She felt this char in behaviour more than her brother. His great p arose from the coolness of the Bradshaws. With the faults which had at times grated on his sensit nature (but which he now forgot, and remembe only their kindness), they were his old familiar frie — his kind, if ostentatious, patrons — his great p sonal interest, out of his own family; and he cou not get over the suffering he experienced from seei their large square pew empty on Sundays — fr

perceiving how Mr. Bradshaw, thougn he bowed in a distant manner when he and Mr. Benson met face to face, shunned him as often as he possibly could. All that happened in the household, which once was as patent to him as his own, was now a sealed book; he heard of its doings by chance, if he heard at all. Just at the time when he was feeling the most depressed from this cause, he met Jemima at a sudden turn of the street. He was uncertain for a moment how to accost her, but she saved him all doubt; in an instant she had his hand in both of hers, her face flushed with honest delight.

"Oh, Mr. Benson, I am so glad to see you! I have so wanted to know all about you! How is poor Ruth? dear Ruth! I wonder if she has forgiven me my cruelty to her? And I may not go to her now, when I should be so glad and thankful to make up for it."

"I never heard you had been cruel to her. I am sure she does not think so."

"She ought, she must. What is she doing? Oh! I have so much to ask, I can never hear enough; and papa says" — she hesitated a moment, afraid of giving pain, and then, believing that they would understand the state of affairs, and the reason for her

behaviour better if she told the truth, she went on: "Papa says I must not go to your house — I suppose it's right to obey him?"

"Certainly, my dear. It is your clear duty. We know how you feel towards us."

"Oh! but if I could do any good — if I could be of any use or comfort to any of you — especially to Ruth, I should come, duty or not. I believe it would be my duty," said she, hurrying on to try and stop any decided prohibition from Mr. Benson. "No! don't be afraid; I won't come till I know I can do some good. I hear bits about you through Sally every now and then, or I could not have waited so long. Mr. Benson," continued she, reddening very much, "I think you did quite right about poor Ruth."

"Not in the falsehood, my dear."

"No! not perhaps in that. I was not thinking of that. But I have been thinking a great deal about poor Ruth's — you know I could not help it when everybody was talking about it — and it made me think of myself, and what I am. With a father and mother, and home and careful friends, I am not likely to be tempted like Ruth; but oh! Mr. Benson," said *she, lifting* her eyes, which were full of tears, to his

face, for the first time since she began to speak, "if you knew all I have been thinking and feeling this last year, you would see how I have yielded to every temptation that was able to come to me; and, seeing how I have no goodness or strength in me, and how I might just have been like Ruth, or rather, worse than she ever was, because I am more headstrong and passionate by nature, I do so thank you and love you for what you did for her! And will you tell me really and truly now if I can ever do anything for Ruth? If you'll promise me that, I wont rebel unnecessarily against papa; but if you don't, I will, and come and see you all this very afternoon. Remember! I trust you!" said she, breaking away. Then turning back, she came to ask after Leonard.

"He must know something of it," said she. "Does he feel it much?"

"Very much," said Mr. Benson. Jemima shook her head sadly.

"It is hard upon him," said she.

"It is," Mr. Benson replied.

For in truth, Leonard was their greatest anxiety in-doors. His health seemed shaken, he spoke half *sentences in his sleep,* which showed that in his dreams

he was battling on his mother's behalf against an u kind and angry world. And then he would wail himself, and utter sad words of shame, which th never thought had reached his ears. By day, he w in general grave and quiet; but his appetite varie and he was evidently afraid of going into the stree dreading to be pointed at as an object of remar Each separately in their hearts longed to give hi change of scene, but they were all silent, for whe was the requisite money to come from?

His temper became fitful and variable. At tim he would be most sullen against his mother; and th give way to a passionate remorse. When Mr. Bens caught Ruth's look of agony at her child's rebuffs, h patience failed; or rather, I should say, he believ that a stronger, severer hand than hers was requir for the management of the lad. But, when she hea Mr. Benson say so, she pleaded with him.

"Have patience with Leonard," she said. "I ha deserved the anger that is fretting in his heart. It only I who can reinstate myself in his love and r spect. I have no fear. When he sees me really st ving hard and long to do what is right, he must lo me. I am not afraid."

Even while she spoke, her lips quivered, and her colour went and came with eager anxiety. So Mr. Benson held his peace, and let her take her course. It was beautiful to see the intuition by which she divined what was passing in every fold of her child's heart, so as to be always ready with the right words to soothe or to strengthen him. Her watchfulness was unwearied, and with no thought of self tainting it, or else she might have often paused to turn aside and weep at the clouds of shame which came over Leonard's love for her, and hid it from all but her faithful heart; she believed and knew that he was yet her own affectionate boy, although he might be gloomily silent, or apparently hard and cold. And in all this, Mr. Benson could not choose but admire the way in which she was insensibly teaching Leonard to conform to the law of right, to recognise Duty in the mode in which every action was performed. When Mr. Benson saw this, he knew that all goodness would follow, and that the claims which his mother's infinite love had on the boy's heart would be acknowledged at last, and all the more fully because she herself never urged them, but silently admitted the force of the reason that caused them to be for a time forgotten.

By-and-by Leonard's remorse at his ungracious ar sullen ways to his mother — ways that alternat with passionate, fitful bursts of clinging love — a sumed more the character of repentance; he tried do so no more. But still his health was delicate; l was averse to going out of doors; he was much grav and sadder than became his age. It was what mu be; an inevitable consequence of what had been; ar Ruth had to be patient, and pray in secret, and wi many tears, for the strength she needed.

She knew what it was to dread the going out in the streets after her story had become known. F days and days she had silently shrunk from this effo But one evening towards dusk, Miss Benson was bus and asked her to go an errand for her; and Ruth g up and silently obeyed her. That silence as to inwa suffering was only one part of her peculiar and exqu site sweetness of nature; part of the patience wi which she "accepted her penance." Her true instinc told her that it was not right to disturb others wi many expressions of her remorse; that the holiest r pentance consisted in a quiet and daily sacrifice. St there were times when she wearied pitifully of her i *action.* She was so willing to serve and work, s

every one despised her services. Her mind, as I have said before, had been well cultivated during these last few years; so now she used all the knowledge she had gained in teaching Leonard, which was an employment that Mr. Benson relinquished willingly, because he felt that it would give her some of the occupation that she needed. She endeavoured to make herself useful in the house in every way she could; but the waters of housekeeping had closed over her place during the time of her absence at Mr. Bradshaw's — and, besides, now that they were trying to restrict every unnecessary expense, it was sometimes difficult to find work for three women. Many and many a time Ruth turned over in her mind every possible chance of obtaining employment for her leisure hours, and nowhere could she find it. Now and then Sally, who was her confidante in this wish, procured her some needlework, but it was of a coarse and common kind, soon done, lightly paid for. But whatever it was, Ruth took it, and was thankful, although it added but a few pence to the household purse. I do not mean that there was any great need of money; but a new adjustment of expenditure was required — a reduction of wants which *had never been very* extravagant.

Ruth's salary of forty pounds was gone, while m
of her "keep," as Sally called it, was thrown upon
Bensons. Mr. Benson received about eighty pound
year for his salary as minister. Of this, he knew
twenty pounds came from Mr. Bradshaw; and when
old man appointed to collect the pew-rents brou
him the quarterly amount, and he found no diminu
in them, he inquired how it was, and learnt that,
though Mr. Bradshaw had expressed to the collector
determination never to come to chapel again, he
added, that of course his pew-rent should be paid
the same. But this Mr. Benson could not suffer;
the old man was commissioned to return the money
Mr. Bradshaw, as being what his deserted minis
could not receive.

Mr. and Miss Benson had about thirty or fo
pounds coming in annually from a sum which, in h
pier days, Mr. Bradshaw had invested in Canal sha
or them. Altogether their income did not fall
short of a hundred a-year, and they lived in the Ch
house free of rent. So Ruth's small earnings were
very little in actual hard commercial account, tho
in another sense they were much; and Miss Ben
always received them with quiet simplicity. By deg

Mr. Benson absorbed some of Ruth's time in a gracious and natural way. He employed her mind in all the kind offices he was accustomed to render to the poor around him. And as much of the peace and ornament of life as they gained now, was gained on a firm basis of truth. If Ruth began low down to find her place in the world, at any rate there was no flaw in the foundation.

Leonard was still their great anxiety. At times the question seemed to be, could he live through all this trial of the elasticity of childhood? And then they knew how precious a blessing — how true a pillar of fire, he was to his mother: and how black the night, and how dreary the wilderness would be, when he was not. The child and the mother were each messengers of God — angels to each other.

They had long gaps between the pieces of intelligence respecting the Bradshaws. Mr. Bradshaw had at length purchased the house at Abermouth, and they were much there. The way in which the Bensons heard most frequently of the family of their former friends, was through Mr. Farquhar. He called on Mr. Benson about a month after the latter had met Jemima in the street. *Mr. Farquhar* was not in the habit of paying

calls on any one; and though he had always entertained and evinced the most kind and friendly feeling towards Mr. Benson, he had rarely been in the Chapel-house. Mr. Benson received him courteously, but he rather expected that there would be some especial reason alleged, before the conclusion of the visit, for its occurrence; more particularly as Mr. Farquhar sat talking on the topics of the day in a somewhat absent manner, as if they were not the subjects most present to his mind. The truth was, he could not help recurring to the last time when he was in that room, waiting to take Leonard a ride, and his heart beating rather more quickly than usual at the idea that Ruth might bring the boy in when he was equipped. He was very full now of the remembrance of Ruth; and yet he was also most thankful, most self-gratulatory, that he had gone no further in his admiration of her — that he had never expressed his regard in words — that no one, as he believed, was cognisant of the incipient love which had grown partly out of his admiration, and partly out of his reason. He was thankful to be spared any implication in the nine-days' wonder which her story had made in Eccleston. And yet his feeling for her had been of *so strong a* character, that he winced, as with extreme

pain, at every application of censure to her name. These censures were often exaggerated, it is true; but when they were just in their judgment of the outward circumstances of the case, they were not the less painful and distressing to him. His first rebound to Jemima was occasioned by Mrs. Bradshaw's account of how severely her husband was displeased at her daughter's having taken part with Ruth; and he could have thanked and almost blessed Jemima when she dropped in (she dared do no more) her pleading excuses and charitable explanations on Ruth's behalf. Jemima had learnt some humility from the discovery which had been to her so great a shock; standing, she had learnt to take heed lest she fell; and when she had once been aroused to a perception of the violence of the hatred which she had indulged against Ruth, she was more reticent and measured in the expression of all her opinions. It showed how much her character had been purified from pride, that now she felt aware that what in her was again attracting Mr. Farquhar was her faithful advocacy of her rival, wherever such advocacy was wise or practicable. He was quite unaware that Jemima had been conscious of his great admiration for Ruth; *he did not know* that she had ever cared enough for

him to be jealous. But the unacknowledged bond between them now was their grief, and sympathy, and pity for Ruth; only in Jemima these feelings were ardent, and would fain have become active; while in Mr. Farquhar they were strongly mingled with thankfulness that he had escaped a disagreeable position, and a painful notoriety. His natural caution induced him to make a resolution never to think of any woman as a wife until he had ascertained all her antecedents, from her birth upwards; and the same spirit of caution, directed inwardly, made him afraid of giving too much pity to Ruth, for fear of the conclusions to which such a feeling might lead him. But still his old regard for her, for Leonard, and his esteem and respect for the Bensons, induced him to lend a willing ear to Jemima's earnest entreaty that he would go and call on Mr. Benson, in order that she might learn something about the family in general, and Ruth in particular. It was thus that he came to sit by Mr. Benson's study fire, and to talk, in an absent way, to that gentleman. How they got on the subject he did not know, more than one-half of his attention being distracted, but they were speaking about politics, when Mr. Farquhar learned that *Mr. Benson took* in no newspaper.

"Will you allow me to send you over my *Times?* I have generally done with it before twelve o'clock, and after that it is really waste-paper in my house. You will oblige me by making use of it."

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you for thinking of it. But do not trouble yourself to send it; Leonard can fetch it."

"How is Leonard now?" asked Mr. Farquhar, and he tried to speak indifferently; but a grave look of intelligence clouded his eyes as he looked for Mr. Benson's answer. "I have not met him lately."

"No!" said Mr. Benson, with an expression of pain in his countenance, though he, too, strove to speak in his usual tone.

"Leonard is not strong, and we find it difficult to induce him to go much out of doors."

There was a little silence for a minute or two, during which Mr. Farquhar had to check an unbidden sigh. But, suddenly rousing himself into a determination to change the subject, he said:

"You will find rather a lengthened account of the exposure of Sir Thomas Campbell's conduct at Baden. *He seems to be* a complete blackleg, in spite of his

baronetcy. I fancy the papers are glad to get hold of anything just now."

"Who is Sir Thomas Campbell?" asked Mr. Benson.

"Oh, I thought you might have heard the report — a true one, I believe — of Mr. Donne's engagement to his daughter. He must be glad she jilted him now, I fancy, after this public exposure of her father's conduct." (That was an awkward speech, as Mr. Farquhar felt; and he hastened to cover it, by going on without much connexion:)

"Dick Bradshaw is my informant about all these projected marriages in high life — they are not much in my way; but since he has come down from London to take his share in the business, I think I have heard more of the news and the scandal of what, I suppose, would be considered high life, than ever I did before; and Mr. Donne's proceedings seem to be an especial object of interest to him."

"And Mr. Donne is engaged to a Miss Campbell, is he?"

"Was engaged; if I understood right, she broke off the engagement to marry some Russian prince or *other* — *a better* match, Dick Bradshaw told me. I

assure you," continued Mr. Farquhar, smiling, "I am a very passive recipient of all such intelligence, and might very probably have forgotten all about it, if the *Times*, of this morning had not been so full of the disgrace of the young lady's father."

"Richard Bradshaw has quite left London, has he?" asked Mr. Benson, who felt far more interest in his old patron's family than in all the Campbells that ever were or ever would be.

"Yes. He has come to settle down here. I hope he may do well, and not disappoint his father, who has formed very high expectations from him; I am not sure if they are not too high for any young man to realise." Mr. Farquhar could have said more, but Dick Bradshaw was Jemima's brother, and an object of anxiety to her.

"I am sure, I trust such a mortification — such a grief as any disappointment in Richard, may not befal his father," replied Mr. Benson.

"Jemima — Miss Bradshaw," said Mr. Farquhar, hesitating, "was most anxious to hear of you all. I hope I may tell her you are all well" (with an emphasis on *all*); "that —"

"*Thank you.* Thank her for us. We are all well;

all except Leonard, who is not strong, as I said before. But we must be patient. Time, and such devoted, tender love as he has from his mother, must do much."

Mr. Farquhar was silent.

"Send him to my house for the papers. It will be a little necessity for him to have some regular exercise, and to face the world. He must do it, sooner or later."

The two gentlemen shook hands with each other warmly on parting; but no further allusion was made to either Ruth or Leonard.

So Leonard went for the papers. Stealing along by back streets — running with his head bent down — his little heart panting with dread of being pointed out as his mother's child — so he used to come back, and run trembling to Sally, who would hush him up to her breast with many a rough-spoken word of pity and sympathy.

Mr. Farquhar tried to catch him to speak to him, and tame him as it were; and, by-and-by, he contrived to interest him sufficiently to induce the boy to stay a *little while in the* house, or stables, or garden. But

the race through the streets was always to be dreaded as the end of ever so pleasant a visit.

Mr. Farquhar kept up the intercourse with the Bensons which he had thus begun. He persevered in paying calls — quiet visits, where not much was said, political or local news talked about, and the same inquiries always made and answered as to the welfare of the two families, who were estranged from each other. Mr. Farquhar's reports were so little varied that Jemima grew anxious to know more particulars.

"Oh, Mr. Farquhar!" said she; "do you think they tell you the truth? I wonder what Ruth can be doing to support herself and Leonard? Nothing that you can hear of, you say; and, of course, one must not ask the downright question. And yet I am sure they must be pinched in some way. Do you think Leonard is stronger?"

"I am not sure. He is growing fast; and such a blow as he has had will be certain to make him more thoughtful and full of care than most boys of his age; both these circumstances may make him thin and pale, which he certainly is."

"*Oh! how I wish* I might go and see them all! I

could tell in a twinkling the real state of things." She spoke with a tinge of her old impatience.

"I will go again, and pay particular attention to anything you wish me to observe. You see, of course, I feel a delicacy about asking any direct questions, or even alluding in any way to these late occurrences."

"And you never see Ruth by any chance?"

"Never!"

They did not look at each other while this last question was asked and answered.

"I will take the paper to-morrow myself; it will be an excuse for calling again, and I will try to be very penetrating; but I have not much hope of success."

"Oh, thank you. It is giving you a great deal of trouble; but you are very kind."

"Kind, Jemima!" he repeated, in a tone which made her go very red and hot; "must I tell you how you can reward me? — Will you call me Walter? — say, thank you, Walter — just for once."

Jemima felt herself yielding to the voice and tone in which this was spoken; but her very consciousness of the depth of her love made her afraid of giving way, and anxious to be wooed, that she might be *reinstated* in her self-esteem.

"No!" said she, "I don't think I can call you so. You are too old. It would not be respectful." She meant it half in joke, and had no idea he would take the allusion to his age so seriously as he did. He rose up, and coldly, as a matter of form, in a changed voice, wished her "Good-by." Her heart sank; yet the old pride was there. But, as he was at the very door, some sudden impulse made her speak:

"I have not vexed you, have I, Walter?"

He turned round, glowing with a thrill of delight. She was as red as any rose; her looks dropped down to the ground.

They were not raised when, half an hour afterwards, she said, "You won't forbid my going to see Ruth, will you? because if you do, I give you notice I shall disobey you." The arm around her waist clasped her yet more fondly at the idea suggested by this speech, of the control which he should have a right to exercise over her actions at some future day.

"Tell me," said he, "how much of your goodness to me, this last happy hour, has been owing to the desire of having more freedom as a wife than as a daughter?"

She was almost glad that he should think she

needed any additional motive to her love for him before she could have accepted him. She was afraid that she had betrayed the deep, passionate regard with which she had long looked upon him. She was lost in delight at her own happiness. She was silent for a time. At length she said:

"I don't think you know how faithful I have been to you ever since the days when you first brought me pistachio-candy from London — when I was quite a little girl."

"Not more faithful than I have been to you," for in truth, the recollection of his love for Ruth had utterly faded away, and he thought himself a model of constancy; "and you have tried me pretty well. What a vixen you have been!"

Jemima sighed; smitten with the consciousness of how little she had deserved her present happiness; humble with the recollection of the evil thoughts that had raged in her heart during the time (which she remembered well, though he might have forgotten it) when Ruth had had the affection which her jealous rival coveted.

"I may speak to your father, may not I, Jemima?"

*No! for so*me reason or fancy which she could not

define, and could not be persuaded out of, she wished to keep their mutual understanding a secret. She had a natural desire to avoid the congratulations she expected from her family. She dreaded her father's consideration of the whole affair as a satisfactory disposal of his daughter to a worthy man, who, being his partner, would not require any abstraction of capital from the concern; and Richard's more noisy delight at his sister's having "hooked" so good a match. It was only her simple-hearted mother that she longed to tell. She knew that her mother's congratulations would not jar upon her, though they might not sound the full organ-peal of her love. But all that her mother knew passed onwards to her father; so for the present, at any rate, she determined to realise her secret position alone. Somehow, the sympathy of all others that she most longed for was Ruth's; but the first communication of such an event was due to her parents. She imposed very strict regulations on Mr. Farquhar's behaviour; and quarrelled and differed from him more than ever, but with a secret joyful understanding with him in her heart, even while they disagreed with each other — for similarity of opinion is not always — I

think not often — needed for fulness and perfection of love.

After Ruth's "detection," as Mr. Bradshaw used to call it, he said he could never trust another governess again; so Mary and Elizabeth had been sent to school the following Christmas, and their place in the family was but poorly supplied by the return of Mr. Richard Bradshaw, who had left London, and been received as a partner.

CHAPTER VII.

THE conversation narrated in the last chapter as taking place between Mr. Farquhar and Jemima, occurred about a year after Ruth's dismissal from her situation. That year, full of small events, and change of place to the Bradshaws, had been monotonous and long in its course to the other household. There had been no want of peace and tranquillity; there had, perhaps, been more of them than in the preceding years, when, though unacknowledged by any, all must have occasionally felt the oppression of the falsehood — and a slight glancing dread must have flashed across their most prosperous state, lest, somehow or another, the mystery should be disclosed. But now, as the shepherd-boy in John Bunyan sweetly sang, "He that is low need fear no fall."

Still their peace was as the stillness of a grey autumnal day, when no sun is to be seen above, and when a quiet film seems drawn before both sky and *earth, as if to rest the* wearied eyes after the summer's

glare. Few events broke the monotony of their lives, and those events were of a depressing kind. They consisted in Ruth's futile endeavours to obtain some employment, however humble; in Leonard's fluctuations of spirits and health; in Sally's increasing deafness; in the final and unmendable wearing-out of the parlour carpet, which there was no spare money to replace, and so they cheerfully supplied its want by a large hearth-rug that Ruth made out of ends of list; and, what was more a subject of unceasing regret to Mr. Benson than all, the defection of some of the members of his congregation, who followed Mr. Bradshaw's lead. Their places, to be sure, were more than filled up by the poor, who thronged to his chapel; but still it was a disappointment to find that people about whom he had been earnestly thinking — to whom he had laboured to do good — should dissolve the connexion without a word of farewell or explanation. Mr. Benson did not wonder that they should go; nay, he even felt it right that they should seek that spiritual help from another, which he, by his error, had forfeited his power to offer; he only wished they had spoken of their intention to him in an open and manly way. *But not* the less did he labour on among those

to whom God permitted him to be of use. He felt age stealing upon him apace, although he said nothing about it, and no one seemed to be aware of it; and he worked the more diligently while "it was yet day." It was not the number of his years that made him feel old, for he was only sixty, and many men are hale and strong at that time of life; in all probability, it was that early injury to his spine which affected the constitution of his mind as well as his body, and predisposed him, in the opinion of some at least, to a feminine morbidness of conscience. He had shaken off somewhat of this since the affair with Mr. Bradshaw; he was simpler and more dignified than he had been for several years before, during which time he had been anxious and uncertain in his manner, and more given to thought than to action.

The one happy bright spot in this grey year, was owing to Sally. As she said of herself, she believed she grew more "nattered" as she grew older; but that she was conscious of her "natteredness" was a new thing, and a great gain to the comfort of the house, for it made her very grateful for forbearance, and more aware of kindness than she had ever been *before. She had* become very deaf; yet she was

uneasy and jealous if she were not informed of all the family thoughts, plans, and proceedings, which often had (however private in their details) to be shouted to her at the full pitch of the voice. But she always heard Leonard perfectly. His clear and bell-like voice, which was similar to his mother's, till sorrow had taken the ring out of it, was sure to be heard by the old servant, though every one else had failed. Sometimes, however, she "got her hearing sudden," as she phrased it, and was alive to every word and noise, more particularly when they did not want her to hear, and at such times she resented their continuance of the habit of speaking loud as a mortal offence. One day, her indignation at being thought deaf called out one of the rare smiles on Leonard's face; she saw it, and said, "Bless thee, lad! if it but amuses thee, they may shout through a ram's horn to me, and I'll never let on I'm not deaf. It's as good a use as I can be of," she continued to herself, "if I can make that poor lad smile a bit."

If she expected to be everybody's confidante, she made Leonard hers. "There!" said she, when she came home from her marketing one Saturday night, "*look here, lad!* Here's forty-two pound, seven shil-

lings, and twopence! It's a mint of money, isn't it? I took it all in sovereigns for fear of fire."

"What is it all for, Sally?" said he.

"Ay, lad! that's asking. It's Mr. Benson's money," said she, mysteriously, "that I've been keeping for him. Is he in the study, think ye?"

"Yes! I think so. Where have you been keeping it?"

"Never you mind!" She went towards the study, but thinking she might have been hard on her darling in refusing to gratify his curiosity, she turned back, and said:

"I say — if thou wilt, thou mayst do me a job of work some day. I'm wanting a frame made for a piece of writing."

And then she returned to go into the study, carrying her sovereigns in her apron.

"Here, Master Thurstan," said she, pouring them out on the table before her astonished master. "Take it, it's all yours."

"All mine! What can you mean?" asked he, bewildered.

She did not hear him, and went on:

"*Lock it up safe*, out o' the way. Dunnot go

and leave it about to tempt folks. I'll not answer for myself if money's left about. I may be cribbing a sovereign."

"But where does it come from?" said he.

"Come from!" she replied. "Where does all money come from, but the Bank, to be sure? I thought any one could tell that."

"I have no money in the Bank!" said he, more and more perplexed.

"No! I knowed that; but I had. Dunnot ye remember how you would raise my wage, last Martinmas eighteen year? You and Faith were very headstrong, but I was too deep for you. See thee! I went and put it i' th' Bank. I was never going to touch it; and if I had died it would have been all right, for I'd a will made, all regular and tight — made by a lawyer (leastways he would have been a lawyer, if he hadn't got transported first). And now, thinks I, I think I'll just go and get it out and give it 'em. Banks is not always safe."

"I'll take care of it for you with the greatest pleasure. Still, you know, banks allow interest."

"*D'ye* suppose I don't know all about interest, *and compound* interest too, by this time? I tell ye I

want ye to spend it. It's your own. It's not mine. It always was yours. Now you're not going to fret me by saying you think it mine."

Mr. Benson held out his hand to her, for he could not speak. She bent forward to him as he sat there, and kissed him.

"Eh, bless ye, lad! It's the first kiss I've had of ye sin' ye were a little lad, and it's a great refreshment. Now don't you and Faith go and bother me with talking about it. It's just yours, and make no more ado."

She went back into the kitchen, and brought out her will, and gave Leonard directions how to make a frame for it; for the boy was a very tolerable joiner, and had a box of tools which Mr. Bradshaw had given him some years ago.

"It's a pity to lose such fine writing," said she; "though I can't say as I can read it. Perhaps you'd just read it for me, Leonard." She sat open-mouthed with admiration at all the long words.

The frame was made, and the will hung up opposite to her bed, unknown to any one but Leonard; and, by dint of his repeated reading it over to her, *she learnt all the* words, except "testatrix," which she

would always call "testy tricks." Mr. Benson had been too much gratified and touched, by her unconditional gift of all she had in the world, to reject it; but he only held it in his hands as a deposit until he could find a safe investment befitting so small a sum. The little re-arrangements of the household expenditure had not touched him as they had done the women. He was aware that meat dinners were not now every-day occurrences; but he preferred puddings and vegetables, and was glad of the exchange. He observed, too, that they all sat together in the kitchen in the evenings; but the kitchen, with the well-scoured dresser, the shining saucepans, the well-blacked grate and whitened hearth, and the warmth which seemed to rise up from the very flags, and ruddily cheer the most distant corners, appeared a very cozy and charming sitting-room; and, besides, it appeared but right that Sally, in her old age, should have the companionship of those with whom she had lived in love and faithfulness so many years. He only wished he could more frequently leave the solitary comfort of his study, and join the kitchen party; where Sally sat as mistress in the chimney-corner, knitting by firelight, and Miss Benson and Ruth, with the candle between them,

stitched away at their work; while Leonard strewed the ample dresser with his slate and books. He did not mope and pine over his lessons; they were the one thing that took him out of himself. As yet his mother could teach him, though in some respects it was becoming a strain upon her acquirements and powers. Mr. Benson saw this, but reserved his offers of help as long as he could, hoping that before his assistance became absolutely necessary, some mode of employment beyond that of occasional plain-work might be laid open to Ruth.

In spite of the communication they occasionally had with Mr. Farquhar, when he gave them the intelligence of his engagement to Jemima, it seemed like a glimpse into a world from which they were shut out. They wondered — Miss Benson and Ruth did at least — much about the details. Ruth sat over her sewing, fancying how all had taken place; and as soon as she had arranged the events which were going on among people and places once so familiar to her, she found some discrepancy, and set to afresh to picture the declaration of love, and the yielding, blushing acceptance; for Mr. Farquhar had told little beyond the mere fact *that there was* an engagement between himself and

Jemima which had existed for some time, but which had been kept secret until now, when it was acknowledged, sanctioned, and to be fulfilled as soon as he returned from an arrangement of family affairs in Scotland. This intelligence had been enough for Mr. Benson, who was the only person Mr. Farquhar saw; as Ruth always shrank from the post of opening the door, and Mr. Benson was apt at recognising individual knocks, and always prompt to welcome Mr. Farquhar.

Miss Benson occasionally thought — and what she thought she was in the habit of saying — that Jemima might have come herself to announce such an event to old friends; but Mr. Benson decidedly vindicated her from any charge of neglect, by expressing his strong conviction that to her they owed Mr. Farquhar's calls — his all but out-spoken offers of service — his quiet, steady interest in Leonard; and, moreover (repeating the conversation he had had with her in the street, the first time they met after the disclosure), Mr. Benson told his sister how glad he was to find that, with all the warmth of her impetuous disposition hurrying her on to rebellion against her father, she was now *attaining to* that just self-control which can distinguish *between* mere wishes and true reasons — that she

could abstain from coming to see Ruth while she could do but little good, reserving herself for some great occasion or strong emergency.

Ruth said nothing, but she yearned all the more in silence to see Jemima. In her recollection of that fearful interview with Mr. Bradshaw, which haunted her yet, sleeping or waking, she was painfully conscious that she had not thanked Jemima for her generous, loving advocacy; it had passed unregarded at the time in intensity of agony — but now she recollected that by no word, or tone, or touch, had she given any sign of gratitude. Mr. Benson had never told her of his meeting with Jemima; so it seemed as if there were no hope of any future opportunity: for it is strange how two households, rent apart by some dissension, can go through life, their parallel existences running side by side, yet never touching each other, near neighbours as they are, habitual and familiar guests as they may have been.

Ruth's only point of hope was Leonard. She was weary of looking for work and employment, which everywhere seemed held above her reach. She was not impatient of this, but she was very, very sorry. She *felt within her such* capability, and all ignored her, and

passed her by on the other side. But she saw som progress in Leonard. Not that he could continue t have the happy development, and genial ripening, whic other boys have; leaping from childhood to boyhood and thence to youth, with glad bounds, and unconscious ly enjoying every age. At present there was no har mony in Leonard's character; he was as full of though and self-consciousness as many men, planning his action long beforehand, so as to avoid what he dreaded, an what she could not yet give him strength to face coward as she was herself, and shrinking from har remarks. Yet Leonard was regaining some of his los tenderness towards his mother; when they were alor he would throw himself on her neck and smother h with kisses, without any apparent cause for such passionate impulse. If any one was by, his man was cold and reserved. The hopeful parts of his c racter were the determination evident in him to " "law unto himself," and the serious thought whi gave to the formation of this law. There was a clination in him to reason, especially and prin with Mr. Benson, on the great questions of ethics the majority of the world have settled long ag *I do not think* he ever so argued with his mot

lovely patience, and her humility, was earning its reward; and from her quiet piety, bearing sweetly the denial of her wishes — the refusal of her begging — the disgrace in which she lay, while others, less worthy, were employed — this, which perplexed him, and almost angered him at first, called out his reverence at last, and what she said he took for his law with proud humility; and thus, softly, she was leading him up to God. His health was not strong; it was not likely to be. He moaned and talked in his sleep, and his appetite was still variable, part of which might be owing to his preference of the hardest lessons to any out-door exercise. But this last unnatural symptom was vanishing before the assiduous kindness of Mr. Farquhar, and the quiet but firm desire of his mother. Next to Ruth, Sally had perhaps the most influence over him; but he dearly loved both Mr. and Miss Benson; although he was reserved on this, as on every point not purely intellectual. His was a hard childhood, and his mother felt that it was so. Children bear any moderate degree of poverty and privation cheerfully; but, in addition to a good deal of this, Leonard had to bear a sense of disgrace attaching to him and to the creature he loved best; this it was that took out of him the buoyancy and

natural gladness of youth, in a way which no scantiness of food or clothing, or want of any outward comfort, could ever have done.

Two years had past away — two long, eventless years. Something was now going to happen, which touched their hearts very nearly, though out of their sight and hearing. Jemima was going to be married this August, and by-and-by the very day was fixed. It was to be on the 14th. On the evening of the 13th, Ruth was sitting alone in the parlour, idly gazing out on the darkening shadows in the little garden; her eyes kept filling with quiet tears, that rose, not for her own isolation from all that was going on of bustle and preparation for the morrow's event, but because she had seen how Miss Benson had felt that she and her brother were left out from the gathering of old friends in the Bradshaw family. As Ruth sat, suddenly she was aware of a figure by her; she started up, and in the gloom of the apartment she recognised Jemima. In an instant they were in each other's arms — a long, fast embrace.

"Can you forgive me?" whispered Jemima in Ruth's ear.

"*Forgive* you! What do you mean? What have I

to forgive? The questions is, can I ever thank you as I long to do, if I could find words?"

"Oh, Ruth, how I hated you once!"

"It was all the more noble in you to stand by me as you did. You must have hated me when you knew how I was deceiving you all!"

"No, that was not it that made me hate you. It was before that. Oh, Ruth, I did hate you!"

They were silent for some time, still holding each other's hands. Ruth spoke first.

"And you are going to be married to-morrow!"

"Yes," said Jemima. "To-morrow, at nine o'clock. But I don't think I could have been married without coming to wish Mr. Benson and Miss Faith good-by."

"I will go for them," said Ruth.

"Not, not just yet. I want to ask you one or two questions first. Nothing very particular; only it seems as if there had been such a strange, long separation between us. Ruth," said she, dropping her voice, "is Leonard stronger than he was? I was so sorry to hear about him from Walter. But he is better?" asked she anxiously.

"Yes, he is better. Not what a boy of his age *should be," replied his* mother, in a tone of quiet but

deep mournfulness. "Oh, Jemima!" continued she, "my sharpest punishment comes through him. To think what he might have been, and what he is!"

"But Walter says he is both stronger in health, and not so — nervous and shy." Jemima added the last words in a hesitating and doubtful manner, as if she did not know how to express her full meaning without hurting Ruth.

"He does not show that he feels his disgrace so much. I cannot talk about it, Jemima, my heart aches so about him. But he is better," she continued, feeling that Jemima's kind anxiety required an answer at any cost of pain to herself. "He is only studying too closely now; he takes to his lessons evidently as a relief from thought. He is very clever, and I hope and trust, yet I tremble to say it, I believe he is very good."

"You must let him come and see us very often when we come back. We shall be two months away. We are going to Germany, partly on Walter's business. Ruth, I have been talking to papa to-night, very seriously and quietly, and it has made me love him so *much more*, and understand him so much better."

"Does he know of your coming here? I hope he does," said Ruth.

"Yes. Not that he liked my doing it at all. But, somehow, I can always do things against a person's wishes more easily when I am on good terms with them — that's not exactly what I meant; but now to-night, after papa had been showing me that he really loved me more than I ever thought he had done (for I always fancied he was so absorbed in Dick, he did not care much for us girls), I felt brave enough to say that I intended to come here and bid you all good-by. He was silent for a minute, and then said I might do it, but I must remember he did not approve of it, and was not to be compromised by my coming; still I can tell that, at the bottom of his heart, there is some of the old kindly feeling to Mr. and Miss Benson, and I don't despair of its all being made up, though, perhaps, I ought to say that mamma does."

"Mr. and Miss Benson won't hear of my going away," said Ruth, sadly.

"They are quite right."

"But I am earning nothing. I cannot get any employment. I am only a burden and an expense."

"Are you not also a pleasure? And Leonard, is he not a dear object of love? It is easy for me to talk, I know, who am so impatient. Oh, I never deserved to be so happy as I am! You don't know how good Walter is. I used to think him so cold and cautious. But now, Ruth, will you tell Mr. and Miss Benson that I am here? There is signing of papers, and I don't know what to be done at home. And when I come back, I hope to see you often, if you 'll let me."

Mr. and Miss Benson gave her a warm greeting. Sally was called in, and would bring a candle with her, to have a close inspection of her, in order to see if she was changed — she had not seen her for so long a time, she said; and Jemima stood laughing and blushing in the middle of the room, while Sally studied her all over, and would not be convinced that the old gown which she was wearing for the last time was not one of the new wedding ones. The consequence of which misunderstanding was, that Sally, in her short petticoats and bed-gown, turned up her nose at the old-fashioned way in which Miss Bradshaw's gown *was* made. But Jemima knew the old woman, and *rather enjoyed* the contempt for her dress. At last

she kissed them all, and ran away to her impatient Mr. Farquhar, who was awaiting her.

Not many weeks after this, the poor old woman whom I have named as having become a friend of Ruth's during Leonard's illness three years ago, fell down and broke her hip-bone. It was a serious — probably a fatal injury, for one so old; and as soon as Ruth heard of it she devoted all her leisure time to old Ann Fleming. Leonard had now outstript his mother's powers of teaching, and Mr. Benson gave him his lessons; so Ruth was a great deal at the cottage both night and day.

There Jemima found her one November evening, the second after their return from their prolonged stay on the Continent. She and Mr. Farquhar had been to the Bensons, and had sat there some time; and now Jemima had come on just to see Ruth for five minutes, before the evening was too dark for her to return alone. She found Ruth sitting on a stool before the fire, which was composed of a few sticks on the hearth. The blaze they gave was, however, enough to enable her to read; and she was deep in study of the Bible, in which she *had read* aloud to the poor old woman, *until the latter had fallen* asleep. Jemima beckoned

her out, and they stood on the green just before open door, so that Ruth could see if Ann awoke.

"I have not many minutes to stay, only I fe if I must see you. And we want Leonard to con us to see all our German purchases, and hear al German adventures. May he come to-morrow?"

"Yes; thank you. Oh! Jemima, I have heard a thing — I have got a plan that makes me so ha I have not told any one yet. But Mr. Wynne parish doctor, you know) has asked me if I woul out as a sick nurse — he thinks he could find me ployment."

"You, a sick nurse!" said Jemima, involunt glancing over the beautiful lithe figure, and the l refinement of Ruth's face, as the light of the r moon fell upon it. "My dear Ruth, I don't think are fitted for it!"

"Don't you?" said Ruth, a little disappointed. think I am; at least, that I should be very soor like being about sick and helpless people; I al feel so sorry for them; and then I think I have gift of a very delicate touch, which is such a co in many cases. And I should try to be very wat *and patient.* Mr. Wynne proposed it himself."

"It was not in that way I meant you were not fitted for it. I meant that you were fitted for something better. Why, Ruth, you are better educated than I am!"

"But if nobody will allow me to teach? — for that is what I suppose you mean. Besides, I feel as if all my education would be needed to make me a good sick nurse."

"Your knowledge of Latin, for instance," said Jemima, hitting, in her vexation at the plan, on the first acquirement of Ruth she could think of.

"Well!" said Ruth, "that won't come amiss; I can read the prescriptions."

"Which the doctors would rather you did not do."

"Still, you can't say that any knowledge of any kind will be in my way, or will unfit me for my work."

"Perhaps not. But all your taste and refinement will be in your way, and will unfit you."

"You have not thought about this so much as I have, or you would not say so. Any fastidiousness I shall have to get rid of, and I shall be better without; but any true refinement I am sure I *shall find of* use; for don't you think that

every power we have may be made to help us in any right work, whatever that is? Would you not rather be nursed by a person who spoke gently and moved quietly about than by a loud bustling woman?"

"Yes! to be sure; but a person unfit for anything else may move quietly, and speak gently, and give medicine when the doctor orders it, and keep awake at night; and those are the best qualities I ever heard of in a sick nurse."

Ruth was quite silent for some time. At last she said: "At any rate it is work, and as such I am thankful for it. You cannot discourage me — and perhaps you know too little of what my life has been — how set apart in idleness I have been — to sympathise with me fully."

"And I wanted you to come to see us — me in my new home. Walter and I had planned that we would persuade you to come to us very often" (she had planned, and Mr. Farquhar had consented); "and now you will have to be fastened up in a sick room."

"I could not have come," said Ruth quickly. "Dear Jemima! it is like you to have thought of it — but I

could not come to your house. It is not a thing to reason about. It is just feeling. But I do feel as if I could not go. Dear Jemima! if you are ill or sorrowful, and want me, I will come —"

"So you would and must to any one, if you take up that calling."

"But I should come to you, love, in quite a different way; I should go to you with my heart full of love — so full that I am afraid I should be too anxious."

"I almost wish I were ill, that I might make you come at once."

"And I am almost ashamed to think how I should like you to be in some position in which I could show you how well I remember that day — that terrible day in the school-room. God bless you for it, Jemima!"

CHAPTER VIII.

Mr. Wynne, the parish surgeon, was right. He could and did obtain employment for Ruth as a sick nurse. Her home was with the Bensons; every spare moment was given to Leonard and to them; but she was at the call of all the invalids in the town. At first her work lay exclusively among the paupers. At first, too, there was a recoil from many circumstances, which impressed upon her the most fully the physical sufferings of those whom she tended. But she tried to lose the sense of these — or rather to lessen them, and make them take their appointed places — in thinking of the individuals themselves, as separate from their decaying frames; and all along she had enough self-command to control herself from expressing any sign of repugnance. She allowed herself no nervous haste of movement or touch that should hurt the feelings of the poorest, most friendless creature, who ever lay a victim to disease. There was no rough *getting over* of all the disagreeable and painful work

of her employment. When it was a lessening of pain to have the touch careful and delicate, and the ministration performed with gradual skill, Ruth thought of her charge and not of herself. As she had foretold, she found a use for all her powers. The poor patients themselves were unconsciously gratified and soothed by her harmony and refinement of manner, voice, and gesture. If this harmony and refinement had been merely superficial, it would not have had this balmy effect. That arose from its being the true expression of a kind, modest, and humble spirit. By degrees her reputation as a nurse spread upwards, and many sought her good offices who could well afford to pay for them. Whatever remuneration was offered to her, she took it simply and without comment: for she felt that it was not hers to refuse; that it was, in fact, owing to the Bensons for her and her child's subsistence. She went wherever her services were first called for. If the poor bricklayer who broke both his legs in a fall from the scaffolding sent for her when she was disengaged, she went and remained with him until he could spare her, let who would be the next claimant. From the happy and prosperous in all but *health, she would* occasionally beg off, when some

one less happy and more friendless wished for her; and sometimes she would ask for a little money from Mr. Benson to give to such in their time of need. But it was astonishing how much she was able to do without money.

Her ways were very quiet; she never spoke much. Any one who has been oppressed with the weight of a vital secret for years, and much more any one the character of whose life has been stamped by one event, and that producing sorrow and shame, is naturally reserved. And yet Ruth's silence was not like reserve; it was too gentle and tender for that. It had more the effect of a hush of all loud or disturbing emotions, and out of the deep calm the words that came forth had a beautiful power. She did not talk much about religion; but those who noticed her knew that it was the unseen banner which she was following. The low-breathed sentences which she spoke into the ear of the sufferer and the dying carried them upwards to God.

She gradually became known and respected among the roughest boys of the rough populace of the town. They would make way for her when she passed along the streets with more deference than they used to most; *for all knew* something of the tender care with which

she had attended this or that sick person, and, besides, she was so often in connexion with Death that something of the superstitious awe with which the dead were regarded by those rough boys in the midst of their strong life, surrounded her.

She herself did not feel changed. She felt just as faulty — as far from being what she wanted to be, as ever. She best knew how many of her good actions were incomplete, and marred with evil. She did not feel much change from the earliest Ruth she could remember. Everything seemed to change but herself. Mr. and Miss Benson grew old, and Sally grew deaf, and Leonard was shooting up, and Jemima was a mother. She and the distant hills that she saw from her chamber window, seemed the only things which were the same as when she first came to Eccleston. As she sat looking out, and taking her fill of solitude, which sometimes was her most thorough rest — as she sat at the attic window looking abroad — she saw their next-door neighbour carried out to sun himself in his garden. When she first came to Eccleston, this neighbour and his daughter were often seen taking long and regular walks; by-and-by, his walks became shorter, *and the attentive* daughter would convoy him home,

and set out afresh to finish her own. Of late years he had only gone out in the garden behind his house; but at first he had walked pretty briskly there by his daughter's help — now he was carried, and placed in a large, cushioned, easy-chair, his head remaining where it was placed against the pillow, and hardly moving when his kind daughter, who was now middle-aged, brought him the first roses of the summer. This told Ruth of the lapse of life and time.

Mr. and Mrs. Farquhar were constant in their attentions; but there was no sign of Mr. Bradshaw ever forgiving the imposition which had been practised upon him, and Mr. Benson ceased to hope for any renewal of their intercourse. Still, he thought that he must know of all the kind attentions which Jemima paid to them, and of the fond regard which both she and her husband bestowed on Leonard. This latter feeling even went so far that Mr. Farquhar called one day, and with much diffidence begged Mr. Benson to urge Ruth to let him be sent to school at his (Mr. Farquhar's) expense.

Mr. Benson was taken by surprise, and hesitated. "I do not know. It would be a great advantage in some respects; and yet I doubt whether it would in

others. His mother's influence over him is thoroughly good, and I should fear that any thoughtless allusions to his peculiar position might touch the raw spot in his mind."

"But he is so unusually clever, it seems a shame not to give him all the advantages he can have. Besides, does he see much of his mother now?"

"Hardly a day passes without her coming home to be an hour or so with him, even at her busiest times; she says it is her best refreshment. And often, you know, she is disengaged for a week or two, except the occasional services which she is always rendering to those who need her. Your offer is very tempting, but there is so decidedly another view of the question to be considered, that I believe we must refer it to her."

"With all my heart. Don't hurry her to a decision. Let her weigh it well. I think she will find the advantages preponderate."

"I wonder if I might trouble you with a little business, Mr. Farquhar, as you are here?"

"Certainly; I am only too glad to be of any use to you."

"Why, I see from the report of the Star Life Assurance Company in the *Times*, which you are so good

as to send me, that they have declared a bonus on the shares; now it seems strange that I have received no notification of it, and I thought that perhaps it might be lying at your office, as Mr. Bradshaw was the purchaser of the shares, and I have always received the dividends through your firm."

Mr. Farquhar took the newspaper, and ran his eye over the report.

"I've no doubt that's the way of it," said he. "Some of our clerks have been careless about it; or it may be Richard himself. He is not always the most punctual and exact of mortals; but I'll see about it. Perhaps after all it mayn't come for a day or two; they have always such numbers of these circulars to send out."

"Oh! I'm in no hurry about it. I only want to receive it some time before I incur any expenses, which the promise of this bonus may tempt me to indulge in."

Mr. Farquhar took his leave. That evening there was a long conference, for, as it happened, Ruth was at home. She was strenuously against the school plan. She could see no advantages that would counterbalance *the evil which* she dreaded from any school for Leonard;

namely, that the good opinion and regard of the world would assume too high an importance in his eyes. The very idea seemed to produce in her so much shrinking affright, that by mutual consent the subject was dropped; to be taken up again, or not, according to circumstances.

Mr. Farquhar wrote the next morning, on Mr. Benson's behalf, to the Insurance Company, to inquire about the bonus. Although he wrote in the usual formal way, he did not think it necessary to tell Mr. Bradshaw what he had done; for Mr. Benson's name was rarely mentioned between the partners; each had been made fully aware of the views which the other entertained on the subject that had caused the estrangement; and Mr. Farquhar felt that no external argument could affect Mr. Bradshaw's resolved disapproval and avoidance of his former minister.

As it happened, the answer from the Insurance Company (directed to the firm) was given to Mr. Bradshaw along with the other business letters. It was to the effect that Mr. Benson's shares had been sold and transferred above a twelvemonth ago, which sufficiently accounted for the circumstance that no notification of *the bonus had been* sent to him.

Mr. Bradshaw tossed the letter on one side, not displeased to have a good reason for feeling a little contempt at the unbusiness-like forgetfulness of Mr. Benson, at whose instance some one had evidently been writing to the Insurance Company. On Mr. Farquhar's entrance he expressed this feeling to him.

"Really," he said, "these Dissenting ministers have no more notion of exactitude in their affairs than a child! The idea of forgetting that he has sold his shares, and applying for the bonus, when it seems he had transferred them only a year ago!"

Mr. Farquhar was reading the letter while Mr. Bradshaw spoke.

"I don't quite understand it," said he. "Mr. Benson was quite clear about it. He could not have received his half-yearly dividends unless he had been possessed of these shares; and I don't suppose Dissenting ministers, with all their ignorance of business, are unlike other men in knowing whether or not they receive the money that they believe to be owing to them."

"I should not wonder if they were — if Benson was, at any rate. Why, I never knew his watch to be right in all my life — it was always too fast or too

slow; it must have been a daily discomfort to him. It ought to have been. Depend upon it, his money matters are just in the same irregular state; no accounts kept, I 'll be bound."

"I don't see that that follows," said Mr. Farquhar, half amused. "That watch of his is a very curious one — belonged to his father and grandfather, I don't know how far back."

"And the sentimental feelings which he is guided by prompt him to keep it, to the inconvenience of himself and everyone else."

Mr. Farquhar gave up the subject of the watch as hopeless.

"But about this letter. I wrote, at Mr. Benson's desire, to the Insurance Office, and I am not satisfied with this answer. All the transaction has passed through our hands. I do not think it is likely Mr. Benson would write and sell the shares without, at any rate, informing us at the time, even though he forgot all about it afterwards."

"Probably he told Richard, or Mr. Watson."

"We can ask Mr. Watson at once. I am afraid we must wait till Richard comes home, for I don't know where a letter would catch him."

Mr. Bradshaw pulled the bell that rang into the head clerk's room, saying as he did so,

"You may depend upon it, Farquhar, the blunder lies with Benson himself. He is just the man to muddle away his money in indiscriminate charity, and then to wonder what has become of it."

Mr. Farquhar was discreet enough to hold his tongue.

"Mr. Watson," said Mr. Bradshaw, as the old clerk made his appearance, "here is some mistake about those Insurance shares we purchased for Benson, ten or a dozen years ago. He spoke to Mr. Farquhar about some bonus they are paying to the shareholders, it seems; and, in reply to Mr. Farquhar's letter, the Insurance Company say the shares were sold twelve months since. Have you any knowledge of the transaction? Has the transfer passed through your hands? By the way" (turning to Mr. Farquhar), "who kept the certificates? Did Benson or we?"

"I really don't know," said Mr. Farquhar. "Perhaps Mr. Watson can tell us."

Mr. Watson meanwhile was studying the letter

When he had ended it, he took off his spectacles, wiped them, and replacing them, he read it again.

"It seems very strange, Sir," he said at length, with his trembling, aged voice, "for I paid Mr. Benson the account of the dividends myself last June, and got a receipt in form, and that is since the date of the alleged transfer."

"Pretty nearly twelve months after it took place," said Mr. Farquhar.

"How did you receive the dividends? An order on the Bank, along with old Mrs. Cranmer's?" asked Mr. Bradshaw, sharply.

"I don't know how they came. Mr. Richard gave me the money, and desired me to get the receipt."

"It 's unlucky Richard is from home," said Mr. Bradshaw. "He could have cleared up this mystery for us."

Mr. Farquhar was silent.

"Do you know where the certificates were kept, Mr. Watson?" said he.

"I 'll not be sure, but I think they were with Mrs. Cranmer's papers and deeds in box A, 24."

"I wish old Cranmer would have made any other

man his executor. She, too, is always coming wi some unreasonable request or other."

"Mr. Benson's inquiry about his bonus is perfect reasonable, at any rate."

Mr. Watson, who was dwelling in the slo fashion of age on what had been said before, no spoke:

"I 'll not be sure, but I am almost certai Mr. Benson said, when I paid him last June, th he thought he ought to give the receipt on a stam and had spoken about it to Mr. Richard the tin before, but that Mr. Richard said it was of r consequence. Yes," continued he, gathering up h memory as he went on, "he did — I remember no — and I thought to myself that Mr. Richard w but a young man. Mr. Richard will know s about it."

"Yes," said Mr. Farquhar, gravely.

"I sha'n't wait till Richard's return," sa Mr. Bradshaw. "We can soon see if the certificat are in the box Watson points out; if they are ther the Insurance people are no more fit to manage the concern than that cat, and I shall tell them so. *they are not* there (as I suspect will prove to be t

case), it is just forgetfulness on Benson's part, as I have said from the first."

"You forget the payment of the dividends," said Mr. Farquhar, in a low voice.

"Well, Sir! what then?" said Mr. Bradshaw, abruptly. While he spoke — while his eye met Mr. Farquhar's — the hinted meaning of the latter flashed through his mind; but he was only made angry to find that such a suspicion could pass through any one's imagination.

"I suppose I may go, Sir," said Watson, respectfully, an uneasy consciousness of what was in Mr. Farquhar's thoughts troubling the faithful old clerk.

"Yes. Go. What do you mean about the dividends?" asked Mr. Bradshaw, impetuously of Mr. Farquhar.

"Simply, that I think there can have been no forgetfulness — no mistake on Mr. Benson's part," said Mr. Farquhar, unwilling to put his dim suspicion into words.

"Then of course it is some blunder of that confounded *Insurance* Company. I will write to them

to-day, and make them a little brisker and more correct in their statements."

"Don't you think it would be better to wait till Richard's return? He may be able to explain it."

"No, Sir!" said Mr. Bradshaw, sharply. "I do not think it would be better. It has not been my way of doing business to spare any one, or any company, the consequences of their own carelessness; nor to obtain information second-hand when I could have it direct from the source. I shall write to the Insurance Office by the next post."

Mr. Farquhar saw that any further remonstrance on his part would only aggravate his partner's obstinacy; and, besides, it was but a suspicion, an uncomfortable suspicion. It was possible that some of the clerks at the Insurance Office might have made a mistake. Watson was not sure, after all, that the certificates had been deposited in box A, 24; and when he and Mr. Farquhar could not find them there, the old man drew more and yet more back from his first assertion of belief that they had been placed there.

Mr. Bradshaw wrote an angry and indignant *reproach* of carelessness to the Insurance Company.

By the next mail one of their clerks came down to Eccleston; and having leisurely refreshed himself at the inn, and ordered his dinner with care, he walked up to the great warehouse of Bradshaw and Co., and sent in his card, with a pencil notification, "On the part of the Star Insurance Company," to Mr. Bradshaw himself.

Mr. Bradshaw held the card in his hand for a minute or two without raising his eyes. Then he spoke out loud and firm:

"Desire the gentleman to walk up. Stay! I will ring my bell in a minute or two, and then show him up-stairs."

When the errand-boy had closed the door, Mr. Bradshaw went to a cupboard where he usually kept a glass, and a bottle of wine (of which he very seldom partook, for he was an abstemious man). He intended now to take a glass, but the bottle was empty; and though there was plenty more to be had for ringing, or even simply going into another room, he would not allow himself to do this. He stood and lectured himself in thought.

"After all, I am a fool for once in my life. If the *certificates are in* no box which I have yet examined,

that does not imply they may not be in some one which I have not had time to search. Farquhar would stay so late last night! And even if they are in none of the boxes here, that does not prove —" He gave the bell a jerking ring, and it was yet sounding when Mr. Smith, the insurance clerk, entered.

The manager of the Insurance Company had been considerably nettled at the tone of Mr. Bradshaw's letter; and had instructed the clerk to assume some dignity at first in vindicating (as it was well in his power to do) the character of the proceedings of the company, but at the same time he was not to go too far, for the firm of Bradshaw and Co. was daily looming larger in the commercial world, and if any reasonable explanation could be given it was to be received, and bygones be bygones.

"Sit down, Sir!" said Mr. Bradshaw.

"You are aware, Sir, I presume, that I come on the part of Mr. Dennison, the manager of the Star Insurance Company, to reply in person to a letter of yours, of the 29th, addressed to him?"

Mr. Bradshaw bowed. "A very careless piece of business," he said, stiffly.

"Mr. Dennison does not think you will consider

it as such when you have seen the deed of transfer, which I am commissioned to show you."

Mr. Bradshaw took the deed with a steady hand. He wiped his spectacles quietly, without delay, and without hurry, and adjusted them on his nose. It is possible that he was rather long in looking over the document — at least, the clerk had just begun to wonder if he was reading through the whole of it, instead of merely looking at the signature, when Mr. Bradshaw said: "It is possible that it may be — of course, you will allow me to take this paper to Mr. Benson, to — to inquire if this be his signature?"

"There can be no doubt of it, I think, Sir," said the clerk, calmly smiling, for he knew Mr. Benson's signature well.

"I don't know, Sir — I don't know." (He was speaking as if the pronunciation of every word required a separate effort of will, like a man who has received a slight paralytic stroke.)

"You have heard, Sir, of such a thing as forgery — forgery, Sir?" said he, repeating the last word very distinctly; for he feared that the first time he had *said it, it was* rather slurred over.

"Oh, Sir, there is no room for imagining su thing, I assure you. In our affairs we become a of curious forgetfulness on the part of those who not of business habits."

"Still I should like to show it Mr. Benson prove to him his forgetfulness, you know. I bel on my soul it is some of his careless forgetfulnes I do, Sir," said he. Now he spoke very quickly. must have been. Allow me to convince myself. shall have it back to-night, or the first thing in morning."

The clerk did not quite like to relinquish the d nor yet did he like to refuse Mr. Bradshaw. If very uncomfortable idea of forgery should have foundation in truth — and he had given up the writ There were a thousand chances to one against being anything but a stupid blunder; the risk more imminent of offending one of the directors.

As he hesitated, Mr. Bradshaw spoke, very cal and almost with a smile on his face. He had rega his self-command. "You are afraid, I see. I as you, you may trust me. If there has been any fi — if I have the slightest suspicion of the truth of *surmise I* threw out just now" — he could not c

speak the bare naked word that was chilling his heart — "I will not fail to aid the ends of justice, even though the culprit should be my own son."

He ended, as he began, with a smile — such a smile! — the stiff lips refused to relax and cover the teeth. But all the time he kept saying to himself:

"I don't believe it — I don't believe it. I'm convinced it's a blunder of that old fool Benson."

But when he had dismissed the clerk, and secured the piece of paper, he went and locked the door, and laid his head on his desk, and moaned aloud.

He had lingered in the office for the two previous nights; at first, occupying himself in searching for the certificates of the Insurance shares; but, when all the boxes and other repositories for papers had been ransacked, the thought took hold of him that they might be in Richard's private desk; and, with the determination which overlooks the means to get at the end, he had first tried all his own keys on the complicated lock, and then broken it open with two decided blows of a poker, the instrument nearest at hand. He did not find the certificates. Richard had always considered himself careful in destroying any dangerous or *tell-tale papers;* but the stern father found enough, in

what remained, to convince him that his pattern son — more even than his pattern son, his beloved pride — was far other than what he seemed.

Mr. Bradshaw did not skip or miss a word. He did not shrink while he read. He folded up letter by letter; he snuffed the candle just when its light began to wane, and no sooner; but he did not miss or omit one paper — he read every word. Then, leaving the letters in a heap upon the table, and the broken desk to tell its own tale, he locked the door of the room which was appropriated to his son as junior partner, and carried the key away with him.

There was a faint hope, even after this discovery of many circumstances of Richard's life which shocked and dismayed his father — there was still a faint hope that he might not be guilty of forgery — that it might be no forgery after all — only a blunder — an omission — a stupendous piece of forgetfulness. That hope was the one straw that Mr. Bradshaw clung to.

Late that night Mr. Benson sat in his study. Everyone else in the house had gone to bed; but he was expecting a summons to some one who was dangerously ill. He was not startled, therefore, at the knock *which came* to the front door about twelve, but he

was rather surprised at the character of the knock, so slow and loud, with a pause between each rap. His study-door was but a step from that which led into the street. He opened it, and there stood — Mr. Bradshaw; his large, portly figure not to be mistaken even in the dusky night.

He said, "That is right. It was you I wanted to see." And he walked straight into the study. Mr. Benson followed, and shut the door. Mr. Bradshaw was standing by the table, fumbling in his pocket. He pulled out the deed; and opening it, after a pause, in which you might have counted five, he held it out to Mr. Benson.

"Read it!" said he. He spoke not another word until time had been allowed for its perusal. Then he added:

"That is your signature?" The words were an assertion, but the tone was that of question.

"No, it is not," said Mr. Benson, decidedly. "It is very like my writing. I could almost say it was mine, but I know it is not."

"Recollect yourself a little. The date is August the third, of last year, fourteen months ago. You may *have forgotten it.*" The tone of the voice had a kind

of eager entreaty in it, which Mr. Benson did n notice, — he was so startled at the fetch of his ow writing.

"It is most singularly like mine; but I could n have signed away these shares — all the property have — without the slightest remembrance of it."

"Stranger things have happened. For the love Heaven, think if you did not sign it. It 's a deed transfer for those Insurance shares, you see. Yo don't remember it? You did not write this name - these words?" He looked at Mr. Benson with cr ving wistfulness for one particular answer. Mr. Ben son was struck at last by the whole proceeding, an glanced anxiously at Mr. Bradshaw, whose manne gait, and voice were so different from usual that h might well excite attention. But as soon as the latt was aware of this momentary inspection, he change his tone all at once.

"Don't imagine, Sir, I wish to force any inven tion upon you as a remembrance. If you did n write this name, I know who did. Once more I as you, — does no glimmering recollection of — havin needed money, we 'll say — I never wanted you t *refuse my* suscription to the chapel, God knows! -

of having sold these accursed shares? — Oh! I see by your face you did not write it; you need not speak to me — I know."

He sank down into a chair near him. His whole figure drooped. In a moment he was up, and standing straight as an arrow, confronting Mr. Benson, who could find no clue to this stern man's agitation.

"You say you did not write these words?" pointing to the signature, with an untrembling finger. "I believe you; Richard Bradshaw did write them."

"My dear Sir — my dear old friend!" exclaimed Mr. Benson, "you are rushing to a conclusion for which, I am convinced, there is no foundation; there is no reason to suppose that because —"

"There is reason, Sir. Do not distress yourself — I am perfectly calm." His stony eyes and immovable face did indeed look rigid. "What we have now to do is to punish the offence. I have not one standard for myself and those I love — (and Mr. Benson, I did love him) — and another for the rest of the world. If a stranger had forged my name, I should have known it was my duty to prosecute him. You must prosecute Richard."

"*I will not,*" said Mr. Benson.

"You think, perhaps, that I shall feel it acutel
You are mistaken. He is no longer as my son
me. I have always resolved to disown any child
mine who was guilty of sin. I disown Richard. I
is as a stranger to me. I shall feel no more at h
exposure — his punishment —" He could not
on, for his voice was choking. "Of course, you unde
stand that I must feel shame at our connexion; it
that that is troubling me; that is but consistent with
man who has always prided himself on the integrity
his name; but as for that boy, who has been broug
up all his life as I have brought up my children,
must be some innate wickedness! Sir, I can cut hi
off, though he has been as my right-hand — belove
Let me be no hindrance to the course of justice, I be
He has forged your name — he has defrauded you
money — of your all, I think you said."

"Some one has forged my name. I am not co
vinced that it was your son. Until I know all t
circumstances, I decline to prosecute."

"What circumstances?" asked Mr. Bradshaw,
an authoritative manner, which would have shown i
ritation but for his self-command.

"The force of the temptation — the previous habits of the person —"

"Of Richard. He is the person," Mr. Bradshaw put in.

Mr. Benson went on, without taking any notice. "I should think it right to prosecute, if I found out that this offence against me was only one of a series committed, with premeditation, against society. I should then feel, as a protector of others more helpless than myself —"

"It was your all," said Mr. Bradshaw.

"It was all my money; it was not my all," replied Mr. Benson; and then he went on as if the interruption had never been: "Against an habitual offender. I shall not prosecute Richard. Not because he is your son — do not imagine that! I should decline taking such a step against any young man without first ascertaining the particulars about him, which I know already about Richard, and which determine me against doing what would blast his character for life — would destroy every good quality he has."

"What good quality remains to him?" asked Mr. Bradshaw. "He has deceived me — he has offended *God.*"

"Have we not all offended Him?" Mr. Benson said, in a low tone.

"Not consciously. I never do wrong consciously. But Richard — Richard." The remembrance of the undeceiving letters — the forgery — filled up his heart so completely that he could not speak for a minute or two. Yet when he saw Mr. Benson on the point of saying something, he broke in:

"It is no use talking, Sir. You and I cannot agree on these subjects. Once more, I desire you to prosecute that boy, who is no longer a child of mine."

"Mr. Bradshaw, I shall nod prosecute him. I have said it once for all. To-morrow you will be glad that I do not listen to you. I should only do harm by saying more at present."

There is always something aggravating in being told, that the mood in which we are now viewing things strongly will not be our mood at some other time. It implies that our present feelings are blinding us, and that some more clear-sighted spectator is able to distinguish our future better than we do *ourselves*. The most shallow person dislikes to be *told that* any one can gauge his depth. Mr. Bradshaw

was not soothed by this last remark of Mr. Benson's. He stooped down to take up his hat and be gone. Mr. Benson saw his dizzy way of groping, and gave him what he sought for; but he received no word of thanks. Mr. Bradshaw went silently towards the door, but, just as he got there, he turned round, and said:

"If there were more people like me, and fewer like you, there would be less evil in the world, Sir. It's your sentimentalists that nurse up sin."

Although Mr. Benson had been very calm during this interview, he had been much shocked by what had been let out respecting Richard's forgery; not by the fact itself so much as by what it was a sign of. Still he had known the young man from childhood, and had seen, and often regretted, that his want of moral courage had rendered him peculiarly liable to all the bad effects arising from his father's severe and arbitrary mode of treatment. Dick would never have had "pluck" enough to be a hardened villain, under any circumstances; but, unless some good influence, some strength, was brought to bear upon him, he might easily sink into the sneaking scoundrel. Mr. Benson determined to go to Mr. Farquhar's the first

thing in the morning, and consult him as a clear-headed family friend — partner in the bus as well as son and brother-in-law to the people cerned.

CHAPTER IX.

WHILE Mr. Benson lay awake for fear of oversleeping himself, and so being late at Mr. Farquhar's (it was somewhere about six o'clock — dark as an October morning is at that time), Sally came to his door and knocked. She was always an early riser; and if she had not been gone to bed long before Mr. Bradshaw's visit last night, Mr. Benson might safely have trusted to her calling him.

"Here's a woman down below as must see you directly. She'll be up-stairs after me if you're not down quick."

"Is it any one from Clarke's?"

"No, no! not it, master," said she, through the keyhole; "I reckon it's Mrs. Bradshaw, for all she's muffled up."

He needed no other word. When he went down, Mrs. Bradshaw sat in his easy-chair, swaying her body to and fro, and crying without restraint. Mr. Benson came up to her, before she was aware that he was there.

"Oh! Sir," said she, getting up and taking ho of both his hands, "you won't be so cruel, will yo I have got some money somewhere — some mon my father settled on me, Sir; I don't know how muc but I think it's more than two thousand pounds, a you shall have it all. If I can't give it you now, I make a will, Sir. Only be merciful to poor Dick - don't go and prosecute him, Sir."

"My dear Mrs. Bradshaw, don't agitate yourself this way. I never meant to prosecute him."

"But Mr. Bradshaw says that you must."

"I shall not, indeed. I have told Mr. Bradshaw so

"Has he been here? Oh! is not he cruel? I don care. I have been a good wife till now. I know have. I have done all he bid me, ever since we wer married. But now I will speak my mind, and say t everybody how cruel he is — how hard to his ow flesh and blood! If he puts poor Dick in prison, will go too. If I'm to choose between my husban and my son, I choose my son; for he will have n friends, unless I am with him."

"Mr. Bradshaw will think better of it. You wi *see*, that, when his first anger and disappointment a *over*, he will not be hard or cruel."

"You don't know Mr. Bradshaw," said she, mournfully, "if you think he 'll change. I might beg and beg — I have done many a time, when we had little children, and I wanted to save them a whipping — but no begging ever did any good. At last I left it off. He 'll not change."

"Perhaps not for human entreaty. Mrs. Bradshaw, is there nothing more powerful?"

The tone of his voice suggested what he did not say.

"If you mean that God may soften his heart," replied she, humbly, "I 'm not going to deny God's power — I have need to think of Him," she continued, bursting into fresh tears, "for I am a very miserable woman. Only think! he cast it up against me last night, and said, if I had not spoilt Dick this never would have happened."

"He hardly knew what he was saying, last night. I will go to Mr. Farquhar's directly, and see him; and you had better go home, my dear Mrs. Bradshaw; you may rely upon our doing all that we can."

With some difficulty he persuaded her not to accompany him to Mr. Farquhar's; but he had, indeed, *to take her to her* own door before he could convince

her that, at present, she could do nothing but wait the result of the consultations of others.

It was before breakfast, and Mr. Farquhar was alone; so Mr. Benson had a quiet opportunity of telling the whole story to the husband before the wife came down. Mr. Farquhar was not much surprised, though greatly distressed. The general opinion he had always entertained of Richard's character had predisposed him to fear, even before the inquiry respecting the Insurance shares. But it was still a shock when it came, however much it might have been anticipated.

"What can we do?" said Mr. Benson, as Mr. Farquhar sat gloomily silent.

"That is just what I was asking myself. I thin I must see Mr. Bradshaw, and try to bring him a litt out of this unmerciful frame of mind. That must the first thing. Will you object to accompany me once? It seems of particular consequence that should subdue his obduracy before the affair wind."

"I will go with you willingly. But I belie rather serve to irritate Mr. Bradshaw; he is rem *of things* he has said to me formerly, and whi *thinks he is* bound to act up to. However.

walk with you to the door, and wait for you (if you 'll allow me) in the street. I want to know how he is to-day, both bodily and mentally; for indeed, Mr. Farquhar, I should not have been surprised last night if he had dropped down dead, so terrible was his strain upon himself."

Mr. Benson was left at the door as he had desired, while Mr. Farquhar went in.

"Oh, Mr. Farquhar, what is the matter?" exclaimed the girls, running to him. "Mamma sits crying in the old nursery. We believe she has been there all night. She will not tell us what it is, nor let us be with her; and papa is locked up in his room, and won't even answer us when we speak, though we know he is up and awake, for we heard him tramping about all night."

"Let me go up to him!" said Mr. Farquhar.

"He won't let you in. It will be of no use." But in spite of what they said, he went up; and, to their surprise, after hearing who it was, their father opened the door, and admitted their brother-in-law. He remained with Mr. Bradshaw about half an hour, and then came into the dining-room, where the two *girls stood huddled* over the fire, regardless of the un-

tasted breakfast behind them; and, writing a lines, he desired them to take his note up to mother, saying that it would comfort her a little, that he should send Jemima, in two or three h with the baby — perhaps to remain some days them. He had no time to tell them more; Je would.

He left them, and rejoined Mr. Benson. "(home and breakfast with me. I am off to Lond an hour or two, and must speak with you first."

On reaching his house, he ran up-stairs t Jemima to breakfast alone in her dressing-room returned in five minutes or less.

"Now I can tell you about it," said he. " my way clearly to a certain point. We must pr Dick and his father meeting just now, or all ho Dick's reformation is gone for ever. His father hard as the nether mill-stone. He has forbidde his house."

"Forbidden you!"

"Yes; because I would not give up Dick as t ly lost and bad; and because I said I should r to London with the clerk, and fairly tell Den (he's a Scotchman, and a man of sense and te

the real state of the case. By the way, we must not say a word to the clerk; otherwise he will expect an answer, and make out all sorts of inferences for himself, from the unsatisfactory reply he must have. Dennison will be upon honour — will see every side of the case — will know you refuse to prosecute; the company of which he is manager are no losers. Well! when I said what I thought wise, of all this — when I spoke as if my course were a settled and decided thing, the grim old man asked me if he was to be an automaton in his own house. He assured me he had no feeling for Dick — all the time he was shaking like an aspen; in short, repeated much the same things he must have said to you last night. However, I defied him; and the consequence is, I 'm forbidden the house, and, what is more, he says he will not come to the office while I remain a partner."

"What shall you do?"

"Send Jemima and the baby. There 's nothing like a young child for bringing people round to a healthy state of feeling; and you don't know what Jemima is, Mr. Benson! No! though you 've known her from her birth. If she can't comfort her mother, and *if the baby can't* steal into her grandfather's heart,

why — I don't know what you may do to me. I shal tell Jemima all, and trust to her wit and wisdom t work at this end, while I do my best at the other."

"Richard is abroad, is not he?"

"He will be in England to-morrow. I must catc him somewhere; but that I can easily do. The diffi cult point will be, what to do with him — what t say to him, when I find him. He must give up hi partnership, that 's clear. I did not tell his father sc but I am resolved upon it. There shall be n tampering with the honour of the firm to which belong."

"But what will become of him?" asked Mr. Ben son, anxiously.

"I do not yet know. But, for Jemima's sake — for his dear old father's sake — I will not leave hir adrift. I will find him some occupation as clear fror temptation as I can. I will do all in my power. An he will do much better, if he has any good in him, a a freer agent, not cowed by his father into a want c individuality and self-respect. I believe I must dis miss you, Mr. Benson," said he, looking at his watch "I have to explain all to my wife, and to go to tha *clerk.* You shall hear from me in a day or two."

Mr. Benson half envied the younger man's elasticity of mind, and power of acting promptly. He himself felt as if he wanted to sit down in his quiet study, and think over the revelations and events of the last twenty-four hours. It made him dizzy even to follow Mr. Farquhar's plans, as he had briefly detailed them; and some solitude and consideration would be required before Mr. Benson could decide upon their justice and wisdom. He had been much shocked by the discovery of the overt act of guilt which Richard had perpetrated, low as his opinion of that young man had been for some time; and the consequence was, that he felt depressed, and unable to rally for the next few days. He had not even the comfort of his sister's sympathy, as he felt bound in honour not to tell her anything; and she was luckily so much absorbed in some household contest with Sally that she did not notice her brother's quiet languor.

Mr. Benson felt that he had no right at this time to intrude into the house which he had been once tacitly forbidden. If he went now to Mr. Bradshaw's without being asked, or sent for, he thought it would seem like presuming on his knowledge of the hidden *disgrace of one of the family*. Yet he longed to go.

he knew that Mr. Farquhar must be writing almos daily to Jemima, and he wanted to hear what he wa doing. The fourth day after her husband's departur she came, within half an hour after the post-delivery and asked to speak to Mr. Benson alone.

She was in a state of great agitation, and ha evidently been crying very much.

"Oh, Mr. Benson!" said she, "will you com with me, and tell papa this sad news about Dick Walter has written me a letter at last, to say h has found him — he could not at first; but now i seems that, the day before yesterday, he heard o an accident which had happened to the Dove coach; it was overturned — two passengers killed and several badly hurt. Walter says we ought t be thankful, as he is, that Dick was not killed He says it was such a relief to him on going t the place — the little inn nearest to where th coach was overturned — to find that Dick was onl severely injured; not one of those who wa killed. But it is a terrible shock to us all. W had had no more dreadful fear to lessen the shock mamma is quite unfit for anything, and we none o *us dare to tell* papa." Jemima had hard work t

keep down her sobs thus far, and now they overmastered her.

"How is your father? I have wanted to hear every day," asked Mr. Benson, tenderly.

"It was careless of me not to come and tell you; but, indeed, I have had so much to do. Mamma would not go near him. He has said something which she seems as if she could not forgive. Because he came to meals, she would not. She has almost lived in the nursery; taking out all Dick's old playthings, and what clothes of his were left, and turning them over, and crying over them."

"Then Mr. Bradshaw has joined you again; I was afraid, from what Mr. Farquhar said, he was going to isolate himself from you all?"

"I wish he had," said Jemima, crying afresh. "It would have been more natural than the way he has gone on; the only difference from his usual habits is, that he has never gone near the office, or else he has come to meals just as usual, and talked just as usual; and even done what I never knew him do before, tried to make jokes — all in order to show us how little he cares."

"*Does he not* go out at all?"

"Only in the garden. I am sure he doe after all; he must care; he cannot shake off ε in this way, though he thinks he can; and that me so afraid of telling him of this accident. W come, Mr. Benson?"

He needed no other word. He went with h she rapidly threaded her way through the by-ε When they reached the house, she went in w knocking, and putting her husband's lette Mr. Benson's hand, she opened the door of her f room, and saying — "Papa, here is Mr. Be left them alone.

Mr. Benson felt nervously incapable of kn what to do, or to say. He had surprised Mr. shaw sitting idly over the fire — gazing dr into the embers. But he had started up, and his chair to the table, on seeing his visitor; after the first necessary words of politeness over, he seemed to expect him to open the c sation.

"Mrs. Farquhar has asked me," said Mr. son, plunging into the subject with a trei heart, "to tell you about a letter she has re *from her husband*;" he stopped for an insta

he felt that he did not get nearer the real difficulty, and yet could not tell the best way of approaching it.

"She need not have given you that trouble. I am aware of the reason of Mr. Farquhar's absence. I entirely disapprove of his conduct. He is regardless of my wishes; and disobedient to the commands which, as my son-in-law, I thought he would have felt bound to respect. If there is any more agreeable subject that you can introduce, I shall be glad to hear you, Sir."

"Neither you, nor I, must think of what we like to hear or to say. You must hear what concerns your son."

"I have disowned the young man who was my son," replied he, coldly.

"The Dover coach has been overturned," said Mr. Benson, stimulated into abruptness by the icy sternness of the father. But, in a flash, he saw what lay below that terrible assumption of indifference. Mr. Bradshaw glanced up in his face one look of agony — and then went grey-pale; so livid that Mr. Benson got up to ring the bell in affright, but *Mr. Bradshaw* motioned to him to sit still.

"Oh! I have been too sudden, Sir — he is alive, he is alive!" he exclaimed, as he saw the ashy face working in a vain attempt to speak; but the poor lips (so wooden, not a minute ago) went working on and on, as if Mr. Benson's words did not sink down into the mind, or reach the understanding. Mr. Benson went hastily for Mrs. Farquhar.

"Oh, Jemima!" said he, "I have done it so badly — I have been so cruel — he is very ill, I fear — bring water, brandy —" and he returned with all speed into the room. Mr. Bradshaw — the great, strong, iron man — lay back in his chair in a swoon, a fit.

"Fetch my mother, Mary. Send for the doctor, Elizabeth," said Jemima, rushing to her father. She and Mr. Benson did all in their power to restore him. Mrs. Bradshaw forgot all her vows of estrangement from the dead-like husband, who might never speak to her, or hear her again, and bitterly accused herself for every angry word she had spoken against him during these last few miserable days.

Before the doctor came, Mr. Bradshaw had opened *his eyes* and partially rallied, although he either

did not, or could not speak. He looked struck down into old age. His eyes were sensible in their expression, but had the dim glaze of many years of life upon them. His lower jaw fell from his upper one, giving a look of melancholy depression to the face, although the lips hid the unclosed teeth. But he answered correctly (in monosyllables, it is true) all the questions which the doctor chose to ask. And the medical man was not so much impressed with the serious character of the seizure as the family, who knew all the hidden mystery behind, and had seen their father lie for the first time with the precursor aspect of death upon his face. Rest, watching, and a little medicine were what the doctor prescribed; it was so slight a prescription, for what had appeared to Mr. Benson so serious an attack, that he wished to follow the medical man out of the room to make further inquiries, and learn the real opinion which he thought must lurk behind. But as he was following the doctor, he — they all — were aware of the effort Mr. Bradshaw was making to rise, in order to arrest Mr. Benson's departure. He did stand up, supporting himself with *one hand on the table*, for his legs shook under him.

Mr. Benson came back instantly to the spot where he was. For a moment, it seemed as if he had not the right command of his voice: but at last he said, with a tone of humble, wistful entreaty, which was very touching:

"He is alive, Sir, is he not?"

"Yes, Sir — indeed he is; he is only hurt. He is sure to do well. Mr. Farquhar is with him," said Mr. Benson, almost unable to speak for tears.

Mr. Bradshaw did not remove his eyes from Mr. Benson's face for more than a minute after his question had been answered. He seemed as though he would read his very soul, and there see if he spoke the truth. Satisfied at last, he sank slowly into his chair; and they were silent for a little space, waiting to perceive if he would wish for any further information just then. At length he put his hands slowly together in the clasped attitude of prayer, and said — "Thank God!"

CHAPTER X.

If Jemima allowed herself now and then to imagine that one good would result from the discovery of Richard's delinquency, in the return of her father and Mr. Benson to something of their old understanding and their old intercourse — if this hope fluttered through her mind, it was doomed to disappointment. Mr. Benson would have been most happy to go, if Mr. Bradshaw had sent for him; he was on the watch for what might be even the shadow of such an invitation — but none came. Mr. Bradshaw, on his part, would have been thoroughly glad if the wilful seclusion of his present life could have been broken by the occasional visits of the old friend whom he had once forbidden the house; but this prohibition having passed his lips, he stubbornly refused to do anything which might be construed into unsaying it. Jemima was for some time in despair of his ever returning to the office, or resuming his old habits of business. He had evidently threatened as much to her husband. All that Jemima

could do was to turn a deaf ear to every allus
this menace, which he threw out from time tc
evidently with a view to see if it had struck
enough into her husband's mind for him to ha
peated it to his wife. If Mr. Farquhar had na
— if it was known only to two or three to have
but for one half hour even, his resolution — Mr.
shaw could have adhered to it, without any othe
son than the maintenance of what he called consis
but which was in fact doggedness. Jemima was
thankful that her mother was absent, and gc
nurse her son. If she had been at home, she
have entreated and implored her husband to fal
into his usual habits, and would have shown
dread of his being as good as his word, that he
have been compelled to adhere to it by the ver
sequence affixed to it. Mr. Farquhar had hard
as it was, in passing rapidly enough between tl
places — attending to his business at Eccleston
deciding, comforting, and earnestly talking, in Ric
sick-room. During an absence of his, it was
sary to apply to one of the partners on some
of importance; and accordingly, to Jemima's
joy, Mr. Watson came up and asked, if her fath

well enough to see him on business? Jemima carried in this inquiry literally; and the hesitating answer which her father gave was in the affirmative. It was not long before she saw him leave the house, accompanied by the faithful old clerk; and when he met her at dinner, he made no allusion to his morning visitor, or to his subsequent going out. But from that time forwards he went regularly to the office. He received all the information about Dick's accident, and his progress towards recovery, in perfect silence, and in as indifferent a manner as he could assume; but yet he lingered about the family sitting-room every morning until the post had come in which brought all letters from the south.

When Mr. Farquhar at last returned to bring the news of Dick's perfect convalescence, he resolved to tell Mr. Bradshaw all that he had done and arranged, for his son's future career; but, as Mr. Farquhar told Mr. Benson afterwards, he could not really say if Mr. Bradshaw had attended to one word that he said.

"Rely upon it," said Mr. Benson, "he has not only attended to it, but treasured up every expression you have used."

"*Well, I tried* to get some opinion, or sign of emo-

tion, out of him. I had not much hope of the latter, I must own; but I thought he would have said whether I had done wisely or not in procuring that Glasgow situation for Dick — that he would, perhaps, have been indignant at my ousting him from the partnership so entirely on my own responsibility."

"How did Richard take it?"

"Oh, nothing could exceed his penitence. If one had never heard of the proverb, 'When the devil was sick, the devil a monk would be,' I should have had greater faith in him; or if he had had more strength of character to begin with, or more reality and less outward appearance of good principle instilled into him. However, this Glasgow situation is the very thing; clear, defined duties, no great trust reposed in him, a kind and watchful head, and introductions to a better class of associates than I fancy he has ever been thrown amongst before. For, you know, Mr. Bradshaw dreaded all intimacies for his son, and wanted him to eschew all society beyond his own family — would never allow him to ask a friend home. Really, when I think of the unnatural life Mr. Bradshaw expected him to lead, I get into charity with him, and *have hopes.* By the way, have you ever succeeded in

persuading his mother to send Leonard to school? He may run the same risk from isolation as Dick: not be able to choose his companions wisely when he grows up, but be too much overcome by the excitement of society to be very discreet as to who are his associates. Have you spoken to her about my plan?"

"Yes! but to no purpose. I cannot say that she would even admit an argument on the subject. She seemed to have an invincible repugnance to the idea of exposing him to the remarks of other boys on his peculiar position."

"They need never know of it. Besides, sooner or later, he must step out of his narrow circle, and encounter remark and scorn."

"True," said Mr. Benson, mournfully. "And you may depend upon it, if it really is the best for Leonard, she will come round to it by-and-by. It is almost extraordinary to see the way in which her earnest and most unselfish devotion to this boy's real welfare leads her to right and wise conclusions."

"I wish I could tame her so as to let me meet her as a friend. Since the baby was born, she comes to see Jemima. My wife tells me, that she sits and holds *it soft in her* arms, and talks to it as if her whole soul

went out to the little infant. But if she hears a strange footstep on the stair, what Jemima calls the 'wild-animal look' comes back into her eyes, and she steals away like some frightened creature. With all that she has done to redeem her character, she should not be so timid of observation."

"You may well say 'with all that she has done!' We of her own household hear little or nothing of what she does. If she wants help, she simply tells us how and why, but if not — perhaps because it is some relief to her to forget for a time the scenes of suffering in which she has been acting the part of comforter, and perhaps because there always was a shy, sweet reticence about her — we never should know what she is and what she does, except from the poor people themselves, who would bless her in words if the very thought of her did not choke them with tears. Yet, I do assure you, she passes out of all this gloom, and makes sunlight in our house. We are never so cheerful as when she is at home. She always had the art of diffusing peace, but now it is positive cheerfulness. And about Leonard; I doubt if the wisest and most thoughtful schoolmaster could teach half as much directly, as *his mother* does unconsciously and indirectly every hour

that he is with her. Her noble, humble, pious endurance of the consequences of what was wrong in her early life, seems expressly fitted to act upon him, whose position is (unjustly, for he has done no harm) so similar to hers."

"Well! I suppose we must leave it alone for the present. You will think me a hard practical man when I own to you, that all I expect from Leonard's remaining a home-bird is that, with such a mother, it will do him no harm. At any rate, remember my offer is the same for a year — two years hence, as now. What does she look forward to making him into, finally?"

"I don't know. The wonder comes into my mind sometimes; but never into hers, I think. It is part of her character — part perhaps of that which made her what she was — that she never looks forward, and seldom back. The present is enough for her."

And so the conversation ended. When Mr. Benson repeated the substance of it to his sister, she mused awhile, breaking out into an occasional whistle (although she had cured herself of this habit in a great measure), and at last she said:

"*Now, do you* know, I never liked poor Dick, and

yet I'm angry with Mr. Farquhar for getting him out of the partnership in such a summary way. I can't get over it, even though he has offered to send Leonard to school. And here he's reigning lord-paramount at the office! As if you, Thurstan, weren't as well able to teach him as any schoolmaster in England! But I should not mind that affront, if I were not sorry to think of Dick (though I never could abide him) labouring away in Glasgow for a petty salary of nobody knows how little, while Mr. Farquhar is taking halves, instead of thirds, of the profits here!"

But her brother could not tell her — and even Jemima did not know, till long afterwards — that the portion of income which would have been Dick's as a junior partner, if he had remained in the business, was carefully laid aside for him by Mr. Farquhar; to be delivered up, with all its accumulated interest, when the prodigal should have proved his penitence by his conduct.

When Ruth had no call upon her time, it was indeed a holiday at Chapel-house. She threw off as much as she could of the care and the sadness in which she had been sharing; and returned fresh and *helpful, ready* to go about in her soft, quiet way, and

fill up every measure of service, and heap it with the fragrance of her own sweet nature. The delicate mending, that the elder women could no longer see to do, was put by for Ruth's swift and nimble fingers. The occasional copying, or patient writing to dictation, that gave rest to Mr. Benson's weary spine, was done by her with sunny alacrity. But, most of all, Leonard's heart rejoiced when his mother came home. Then came the quiet confidence, the tender exchange of love, the happy walks from which he returned stronger and stronger — going from strength to strength as his mother led the way. It was well, as they saw now, that the great shock of the disclosure had taken place when it did. She, for her part, wondered at her own cowardliness in having even striven to keep back the truth from her child — the truth that was so certain to be made clear, sooner or later, and which it was only owing to God's mercy that she was alive to encounter with him, and, by so encountering, shield and give him good courage. Moreover, in her secret heart, she was thankful that all occurred while he was yet too young to have much curiosity as to his father. If an unsatisfied feeling of this kind occasionally stole *into his mind, at any* rate she never heard any expres-

sion of it; for the past was a sealed book between them. And so, in the bright strength of good endeavour, the days went on, and grew again to months and years.

Perhaps one little circumstance which occurred during this time had scarcely external importance enough to be called an event; but in Mr. Benson's mind it took rank as such. One day, about a year after Richard Bradshaw had ceased to be a partner in his father's house, Mr. Benson encountered Mr. Farquhar in the street, and heard from him of the creditable and respectable manner in which Richard was conducting himself in Glasgow, where Mr. Farquhar had lately been on business.

"I am determined to tell his father of this," said he; "I think his family are far too obedient to his tacit prohibition of all mention of Richard's name."

"Tacit prohibition?" inquired Mr. Benson.

"Oh! I dare say I use the words in a wrong sense for the correctness of a scholar; but what I mean is, that he made a point of immediately leaving the room if Richard's name was mentioned; and did it in so marked a manner, that by degrees they understood *that it was* their father's desire that he should never

be alluded to; which was all very well as long as there was nothing pleasant to be said about him; but to-night I am going there, and shall take good care he does not escape me before I have told him all I have heard and observed about Richard. He will never be a hero of virtue, for his education has drained him of all moral courage; but with care, and the absence of all strong temptation for a time, he will do very well; nothing to gratify paternal pride, but certainly nothing to be ashamed of."

It was on the Sunday after this that the little circumstance to which I have alluded took place.

During the afternoon service, Mr. Benson became aware that the large Bradshaw pew was no longer unoccupied. In a dark corner Mr. Bradshaw's white head was to be seen, bowed down low in prayer. When last he had worshipped there, the hair on that head was iron-grey, and even in prayer he had stood erect, with an air of conscious righteousness sufficient for all his wants, and even some to spare with which to judge others. Now, that white and hoary head was never uplifted; part of his unobtrusiveness might, it is true, be attributed to the uncomfortable feeling which was sure *to attend any* open withdrawal of the declaration

he had once made, never to enter the chapel in which Mr. Benson was minister again; and, as such a feeling was natural to all men, and especially to such a one as Mr. Bradshaw, Mr. Benson instinctively respected it, and passed out of the chapel with his household, without ever directing his regards to the obscure place where Mr. Bradshaw still remained immovable.

From this day Mr. Benson felt sure that the old friendly feeling existed once more between them, although some time might elapse before any circumstance gave the signal for a renewal of their intercourse.

CHAPTER XI.

Old people tell of certain years when typhus fever swept over the country like a pestilence; years that bring back the remembrance of deep sorrow — refusing to be comforted — to many a household; and which those whose beloved passed through the fiery time unscathed, shrink from recalling: for great and tremulous was the anxiety — miserable the constant watching for evil symptoms; and beyond the threshold of home a dense cloud of depression hung over society at large. It seemed as if the alarm was proportionate to the previous light-heartedness of fancied security — and indeed it was so; for, since the days of King Belshazzar, the solemn decrees of Doom have ever seemed most terrible when they awe into silence the merry revellers of life. So it was this year to which I come in the progress of my story.

The summer had been unusually gorgeous. Some had complained of the steaming heat, but others had *pointed to the lush vegetation*, which was profuse and

luxuriant. The early autumn was wet and cold, but people did not regard it, in contemplation of some proud rejoicing of the nation, which filled every newspaper and gave food to every tongue. In Eccleston these rejoicings were greater than in most places; for, by the national triumph of arms, it was supposed that a new market for the staple manufacture of the place would be opened; and so the trade, which had for a year or two been languishing, would now revive with redoubled vigour. Besides these legitimate causes of good spirits, there was the rank excitement of a coming election, in consequence of Mr. Donne having accepted a Government office, procured for him by one of his influential relations. This time, the Cranworths roused themselves from their magnificent torpor of security in good season, and were going through a series of pompous and ponderous hospitalities, in order to bring back the Eccleston voters to their allegiance.

While the town was full of these subjects by turns — now thinking and speaking of the great revival of trade — now of the chances of the election, as yet some weeks distant — now of the balls at Cranworth Court, in which Mr. Cranworth had danced with all *the belles* of the shopocracy of Eccleston — there

came creeping, creeping, in hidden, slimy courses, the terrible fever — that fever which is never utterly banished from the sad haunts of vice and misery, but lives in such darkness, like a wild beast in the recesses of his den. It had begun in the low Irish lodging-houses; but there it was so common it excited little attention. The poor creatures died almost without the attendance of the unwarned medical men, who received their first notice of the spreading plague from the Roman Catholic priests.

Before the medical men of Eccleston had had time to meet together and consult, and compare the knowledge of the fever which they had severally gained, it had, like the blaze of a fire which had long smouldered, burst forth in many places at once — not merely among the loose-living and vicious, but among the decently poor — nay, even among the well-to-do and respectable. And, to add to the horror, like all similar pestilences, its course was most rapid at first, and was fatal in the great majority of cases — hopeless from the beginning. There was a cry, and then a deep silence, and then rose the long wail of the survivors.

A portion of the Infirmary of the town was added *to that already set* apart for a fever ward; the smitten

were carried thither at once, whenever it was possible, in order to prevent the spread of infection; and on that lazaar-house was concentrated all the medical skill and force of the place.

But when one of the physicians had died, in consequence of his attendance — when the customary staff of matrons and nurses had been swept off in two days — and the nurses belonging to the Infirmary had shrunk from being drafted into the pestilential fever-ward — when high wages had failed to tempt any to what, in their panic, they considered as certain death — when the doctors stood aghast at the swift mortality among the untended sufferers, who were dependent only on the care of the most ignorant hirelings, too brutal to recognise the solemnity of Death (all this had happened within a week from the first acknowledgment of the presence of the plague) — Ruth came one day, with a quieter step than usual, into Mr. Benson's study, and told him she wanted to speak to him for a few minutes.

"To be sure, my dear! Sit down!" said he; for she was standing and leaning her head against the chimney-piece, idly gazing into the fire. She went on *standing there*, as if she had not heard his words; and

it was a few moments before she began to speak. Then she said:

"I want to tell you, that I have been this morning and offered myself as matron to the fever-ward while it is so full. They have accepted me; and I am going this evening."

"Oh, Ruth! I feared this; I saw your look this morning as we spoke of this terrible illness."

"Why do you say 'fear,' Mr. Benson? You yourself have been with John Harrison, and old Betty, and many others, I dare say, of whom we have not heard."

"But this is so different! in such poisoned air! among such malignant cases! Have you thought and weighed it enough, Ruth?"

She was quite still for a moment, but her eyes grew full of tears. At last she said, very softly, with a kind of still solemnity:

"Yes! I have thought, and I have weighed. But through the very midst of all my fears and thoughts I have felt that I must go."

The remembrance of Leonard was present in both their minds; but for a few moments longer they neither of them spoke. Then Ruth said:

"I believe I have no fear. That is a great preservative, they say. At any rate, if I have a little natural shrinking, it is quite gone when I remember that I am in God's hands! Oh, Mr. Benson," continued she, breaking out into the irrepressible tears — "Leonard, Leonard!"

And now it was his turn to speak out the brave words of faith.

"Poor, poor mother!" said he. "But be of good heart. He, too, is in God's hands. Think what a flash of time only will separate you from him, if you should die in this work!"

"But he — but he — it will be long to him, Mr. Benson! He will be alone!"

"No, Ruth, he will not. God and all good men will watch over him. But if you cannot still this agony of fear as to what will become of him, you ought not to go. Such tremulous passion will predispose you to take the fever."

"I will not be afraid," she replied, lifting up her face, over which a bright light shone, as of God's radiance. "I am not afraid for myself. I will not be so for my darling."

After a little pause, they began to arrange the

manner of her going, and to speak about the length of time that she might be absent on her temporary duties. In talking of her return, they assumed it to be certain, although the exact time when was to them unknown, and would be dependent entirely on the duration of the fever; but not the less, in their secret hearts, did they feel where alone the issue lay. Ruth was to communicate with Leonard and Miss Faith through Mr. Benson alone, who insisted on his determination to go every evening to the hospital to learn the proceedings of the day, and the state of Ruth's health.

"It is not alone on your account, my dear! There may be many sick people of whom, if I can give no other comfort, I can take intelligence to their friends."

All was settled with grave composure; yet still Ruth lingered, as if nerving herself up for some effort. At length she said, with a faint smile upon her pale face:

"I believe I am a great coward. I stand here talking because I dread to tell Leonard."

"You must not think of it," exclaimed he. "Leave it to me. It is sure to unnerve you."

"*I must think of it.* I shall have self-control enough

in a minute to do it calmly — to speak hopefully. For only think," continued she, smiling through the tears that would gather in her eyes, "what a comfort the remembrance of the last few words may be to the poor fellow, if —" The words were choked, but she smiled bravely on. "No!" said she, "that must be done; but perhaps you will spare me one thing — will you tell Aunt Faith? I suppose I am very weak, but, knowing that I must go, and not knowing what may be the end, I feel as if I could not bear to resist entreaties just at last. Will you tell her, Sir, while I go to Leonard?"

Silently he consented, and the two rose up and came forth, calm and serene. And calmly and gently did Ruth tell her boy of her purpose; not daring even to use any unaccustomed tenderness of voice or gesture, lest, by so doing, she should alarm him unnecessarily as to the result. She spoke hopefully, and bade him be of good courage; and he caught her bravery, though his, poor boy! had root rather in his ignorance of the actual imminent danger than in her deep faith.

When he had gone down, Ruth began to arrange her dress. When she came down-stairs she went into *the old familiar* garden and gathered a nosegay of the

last lingering autumn flowers — a few roses and the like.

Mr. Benson had tutored his sister well; and although Miss Faith's face was swollen with crying, she spoke with almost exaggerated cheerfulness to Ruth. Indeed, as they all stood at the front door, making-believe to have careless nothings to say, just as at an ordinary leave-taking, you would not have guessed the strained chords of feeling there were in each heart. They lingered on, the last rays of the setting sun falling on the group. Ruth once or twice had roused herself to the pitch of saying "Good-by," but when her eye fell on Leonard she was forced to hide the quivering of her lips, and conceal her trembling mouth amid the bunch of roses.

"They won't let you have your flowers, I'm afraid," said Miss Benson. "Doctors so often object to the smell."

"No; perhaps not," said Ruth, hurriedly. "I did not think of it. I will only keep this one rose. Here, Leonard, darling!" She gave the rest to him. It was her farewell; for having now no veil to hide her emotion, she *summoned* all her bravery for one parting *smile, and, smiling*, turned away. But she gave one

look back from the street, just from the last point at which the door could be seen, and catching a glimpse of Leonard standing foremost on the step, she ran back, and he met her half-way, and mother and child spoke never a word in that close embrace.

"Now, Leonard," said Miss Faith, "be a brave boy. I feel sure she will come back to us before very long."

But she was very near crying herself; and she would have given way, I believe, if she had not found the wholesome outlet of scolding Sally, for expressing just the same opinion respecting Ruth's proceedings as she herself had done not two hours before. Taking what her brother had said to her as a text, she delivered such a lecture to Sally on want of faith that she was astonished at herself, and so much affected by what she had said that she had to shut the door of communication between the kitchen and the parlour pretty hastily, in order to prevent Sally's threatened reply from weakening her belief in the righteousness of what Ruth had done. Her words had gone beyond her conviction.

Evening after evening Mr. Benson went forth to *gain news of* Ruth; and night after night he returned

with good tidings. The fever, it is true, raged; but no plague came nigh her. He said her face was ever calm and bright, except when clouded by sorrow as she gave the accounts of the deaths which occurred in spite of every care. He said that he had never seen her face so fair and gentle as it was now, when she was living in the midst of disease and woe.

One evening Leonard (for they had grown bolder as to the infection) accompanied him to the street on which the hospital abutted. Mr. Benson left him there, and told him to return home; but the boy lingered, attracted by the crowd that had gathered, and were gazing up intently towards the lighted windows of the hospital. There was nothing beyond that to be seen; but the greater part of these poor people had friends or relations in that palace of Death.

Leonard stood and listened. At first their talk consisted of vague and exaggerated accounts (if such could be exaggerated) of the horrors of the fever. Then they spoke of Ruth — of his mother; and Leonard held his breath to hear.

"They say she has been a great sinner, and that *this is her penance*," quoth one. And as Leonard

gasped, before rushing forward to give the speaker straight the lie, an old man spoke:

"Such a one as her has never been a great sinner; nor does she do her work as a penance, but for the love of God, and of the blessed Jesus. She will be in the light of God's countenance when you and I will be standing afar off. I tell you, man, when my poor wench died, as no one would come near, her head lay at that hour on this woman's sweet breast. I could fell you," the old man went on, lifting his shaking arm, "for calling that woman a great sinner. The blessing of them who were ready to perish is upon her."

Immediately there arose a clamour of tongues, each with some tale of his mother's gentle doings, till Leonard grew dizzy with the beatings of his glad, proud heart. Few were aware how much Ruth had done; she never spoke of it, shrinking with sweet shyness from over-much allusion to her own work at all times. Her left hand truly knew not what her right hand did; and Leonard was overwhelmed now to hear of the love and the reverence with which the poor and *outcast had* surrounded her. It was irrepressible. He *stepped forward* with a proud bearing, and touching

the old man's arm, who had first spoken, Leonard tried to speak; but for an instant he could not, his heart was too full: tears came before words, but at length he managed to say:

"Sir, I am her son!"

"Thou! thou her bairn! God bless you, lad," said an old woman, pushing through the crowd. "It was but last night she kept my child quiet with singing psalms the night through. Low and sweet, low and sweet, they tell me — till many poor things were hushed, though they were out of their minds, and had not heard psalms this many a year. God in heaven bless you, lad!"

Many other wild, woe-begone creatures pressed forward with blessings on Ruth's son, while he could only repeat:

"She is my mother."

From that day forward Leonard walked erect in the streets of Eccleston, where "many arose and called her blessed."

After some weeks the virulence of the fever abated; and the general panic subsided — indeed, a kind of fool-hardiness succeeded. To be sure, in some instances the panic still held possession of individuals to

an exaggerated extent. But the number of patients in the hospital was rapidly diminishing, and, for money, those were to be found who could supply Ruth's place. But to her it was owing that the overwrought fear of the town was subdued; it was she who had gone voluntarily, and, with no thought of greed or gain, right into the very jaws of the fierce disease. She bade the inmates of the hospital farewell, and after carefully submitting herself to the purification recommended by Mr. Davis, the principal surgeon of the place, who had always attended Leonard, she returned to Mr. Benson's just at gloaming time.

They each vied with the other in the tenderest cares. They hastened tea; they wheeled the sofa to the fire; they made her lie down; and to all she submitted with the docility of a child; and when the candles came, even Mr. Benson's anxious eye could see no change in her looks, but that she seemed a little paler. The eyes were as full of spiritual light, the gently parted lips as rosy, and the smile, if more rare, yet as sweet as ever.

CHAPTER XII.

THE next morning, Miss Benson would insist upon making Ruth lie down on the sofa. Ruth longed to do many things; to be much more active; but she submitted, when she found that it would gratify Miss Faith if she remained as quiet as if she were really an invalid.

Leonard sat by her holding her hand. Every now and then he looked up from his book, as if to make sure that she indeed was restored to him. He had brought her down the flowers which she had given him the day of her departure, and which he had kept in water as long as they had any greenness or fragrance, and then had carefully dried and put by. She too, smiling, had produced the one rose which she had carried away to the hospital. Never had the bond between her and her boy been drawn so firm and strong.

Many visitors came this day to the quiet Chapel-house. First of all Mrs. Farquhar appeared. She looked *very different from* the Jemima Bradshaw of three years

ago. Happiness had called out beauty; the colouring of her face was lovely, and vivid as that of an autumn day; her berry-red lips scarce closed over the short white teeth for her smiles; and her large dark eyes glowed and sparkled with daily happiness. They were softened by a mist of tears as she looked upon Ruth.

"Lie still! Don't move! You must be content to-day to be waited upon, and nursed! I have just seen Miss Benson in the lobby, and had charge upon charge not to fatigue you. Oh, Ruth! how we all love you, now we have you back again! Do you know, I taught Rosa to say her prayers as soon as ever you were gone to that horrid place, just on purpose that her little innocent lips might pray for you — I wish you could hear her say it — 'Please, dear God, keep Ruth safe.' Oh, Leonard! are not you proud of your mother?"

Leonard said "Yes," rather shortly, as if he were annoyed that any one else should know, or even have a right to imagine, how proud he was. Jemima went on:

"Now, Ruth! I have got a plan for you. Walter and I have partly made it; and partly it 's papa's doing. *Yes, dear!* papa has been quite anxious to show his *respect for* you. We all want you to go to the dear

Eagle's Crag for this next month, and get strong, and have some change in that fine air at Abermouth. I am going to take little Rosa there. Papa has lent it to us. And the weather is often very beautiful in November."

"Thank you very much. It is very tempting; for I have been almost longing for some such change. I cannot tell all at once whether I can go; but I will see about it, if you will let me leave it open a little."

"Oh! as long as you like, so that you will but go at last. And, Master Leonard! you are to come too. Now, I know I have you on my side."

Ruth thought of the place. Her only reluctance arose from the remembrance of that one interview on the sands. That walk she could never go again; but how much remained! How much that would be a charming balm and refreshment to her!

"What happy evenings we shall have together! Do you know, I think Mary and Elizabeth may perhaps come."

A bright gleam of sunshine came into the room. "Look! how bright and propitious for our plans. Dear Ruth, it seems like an omen for the future!"

Almost while she spoke, Miss Benson entered, *bringing with her* Mr. Grey, the rector of Eccleston.

He was an elderly man, short and stoutly-built, with something very formal in his manner; but any one might feel sure of his steady benevolence who noticed the expression of his face, and especially of the kindly black eyes that gleamed beneath his grey and shaggy eyebrows. Ruth had seen him at the hospital once or twice, and Mrs. Farquhar had met him pretty frequently in general society.

"Go and tell your uncle," said Miss Benson to Leonard.

"Stop, my boy! I have just met Mr. Benson in the street, and my errand now is to your mother. I should like you to remain and hear what it is; and I am sure that my business will give these ladies" — bowing to Miss Benson and Jemima — "so much pleasure, that I need not apologise for entering upon it in their presence."

He pulled out his double eye-glass, saying, with a grave smile:

"You ran away from us yesterday so quietly and cunningly, Mrs. Denbigh, that you were, perhaps, not aware that the Board was sitting at that very time, and trying to form a vote sufficiently expressive of our *gratitude* to you. As Chairman, they requested me

to present you with this letter, which I shall have the pleasure of reading."

With all due emphasis he read aloud a formal letter from the Secretary to the Infirmary, conveying a vote of thanks to Ruth.

The good rector did not spare her one word, from date to signature; and then, folding the letter up, he gave it to Leonard, saying:

"There, Sir! when you are an old man, you may read that testimony to your mother's noble conduct with pride and pleasure. For, indeed," continued he, turning to Jemima, "no words can express the relief it was to us. I speak of the gentlemen composing the Board of the Infirmary. When Mrs. Denbigh came forward, the panic was at its height, and the alarm of course aggravated the disorder. The poor creatures died rapidly; there was hardly time to remove the dead bodies before others were brought in to occupy the beds, so little help was to be procured on account of the universal terror; and the morning when Mrs. Denbigh offered us her services, we seemed at the very worst. I shall never forget the sensation of relief in *my mind* when she told us what she proposed to do,

but we thought it right to warn her to the full extent —

"Nay, Madam," said he, catching a glimpse of Ruth's changing colour, "I will spare you any more praises. I will only say, if I can be a friend to you, or a friend to your child, you may command my poor powers to the utmost."

He got up, and bowing formally, he took his leave. Jemima came and kissed Ruth. Leonard went upstairs to put the precious letter away. Miss Benson sat crying heartily in a corner of the room. Ruth went to her, and threw her arms round her neck, and said:

"I could not tell him just then. I durst not speak for fear of breaking down; but if I have done right, it was all owing to you and Mr. Benson. Oh! I wish I had said how the thought first came into my head from seeing the things Mr. Benson has done so quietly ever since the fever first came amongst us. I could not speak; and it seemed as if I was taking those praises to myself, when all the time I was feeling how little I deserved them — how it was all owing to you."

"Under God, Ruth," said Miss Benson, speaking *through* her tears.

"Oh! I think there is nothing humbles one so much as undue praise. While he was reading that letter, I could not help feeling how many things I have done wrong! Could he know of — of what I have been?" asked she, dropping her voice very low.

"Yes!" said Jemima, "he knew — everybody in Eccleston did know — but the remembrance of those days is swept away. Miss Benson," she continued, for she was anxious to turn the subject, "you must be on my side, and persuade Ruth to come to Abermouth for a few weeks. I want her and Leonard both to come."

"I 'm afraid my brother will think that Leonard is missing his lessons sadly. Just of late we could not wonder that the poor child's heart was so full; but he must make haste, and get on all the more for his idleness." Miss Benson piqued herself on being a disciplinarian.

"Oh, as for lessons, Walter is so very anxious that you should give way to his superior wisdom, Ruth, and let Leonard go to school. He will send him to any school you fix upon, according to the mode of life you plan for him."

"*I have no plan,*" said Ruth. "I have no means

of planning. All I can do is to try and make him ready for anything."

"Well," said Jemima, "we must talk it over at Abermouth; for I am sure you won't refuse to come, dearest, dear Ruth! Think of the quiet, sunny days, and the still evenings, that we shall have together, with little Rosa to tumble about among the fallen leaves; and there's Leonard to have his first sight of the sea."

"I do think of it," said Ruth, smiling at the happy picture Jemima drew. And both smiling at the hopeful prospect before them, they parted — never to meet again in life.

No sooner had Mrs. Farquhar gone than Sally burst in.

"Oh! dear, dear!" said she, looking around her. "If I had but known that the rector was coming to call, I'd ha' put on the best covers, and the Sunday tablecloth! You're well enough," continued she, surveying Ruth from head to foot; "you're always trim and dainty in your gowns, though I reckon they cost but tuppence a yard, and you've a face to set 'em off; but as for you" (as she turned to Miss Benson), "I *think you might* ha' had something better on than that.

old stuff, if it had only been to do credit to a parishioner like me, whom he has known ever sin' my father was his clerk."

"You forget, Sally, I had been making jelly all the morning. How could I tell it was Mr. Grey when there was a knock at the door?" Miss Benson replied.

"You might ha' letten me do the jelly; I 'se warrant I cou'd ha' pleased Ruth as well as you. If I had but known he was coming, I 'd ha' slipped round the corner and bought ye a neck-ribbon, or summut to lighten ye up. I 'se loth he should think I 'm living with Dissenters, that don't know how to keep themselves trig and smart."

"Never mind, Sally; he never thought of me. What he came for, was to see Ruth; and, as you say, she 's always neat and dainty."

"Well! I reckon it cannot be helped now; but if I buy ye a ribbon, will you promise to wear it when church-folks come? for I cannot abide the way they have of scoffing at the Dissenters about their dress."

"Very well! we'll make that bargain," said Miss Benson; "and *now*, Ruth, I'll go and fetch you a *cup of warm jelly.*"

"Oh! indeed, Aunt Faith," said Ruth, "I am very sorry to balk you; but, if you're going to treat me as an invalid, I am afraid I shall rebel."

But when she found that Aunt Faith's heart was set upon it, she submitted very graciously; only dimpling up a little, as she found that she must consent to lie on the sofa, and be fed, when, in truth, she felt full of health, with a luxurious sensation of languor stealing over her now and then, just enough to make it very pleasant to think of the salt breezes, and the sea beauty which awaited her at Abermouth.

Mr. Davis called in the afternoon, and his visit was also to Ruth. Mr. and Miss Benson were sitting with her in the parlour, and watching her with contented love, as she employed herself in household sewing, and hopefully spoke about the Abermouth plan.

"Well! so you had our worthy rector here to-day; I am come on something of the same kind of errand; only I shall spare you the reading of my letter, which, I'll answer for it, he did not. Please to take notice," said he, putting down a sealed letter, "that I have delivered you a vote of thanks from my medical brothers; and open and read it at your leisure, only rest

now, for I want to have a little talk with you on my own behoof. I want to ask you a favour, Mrs. Denbigh."

"A favour!" exclaimed Ruth; "what can I do for you? I think I may say I will do it, without hearing what it is."

"Then you're a very imprudent woman," replied he; "however, I'll take you at your word. I want you to give me your boy."

"Leonard!"

"Ay! there it is, you see, Mr. Benson. One minute she is as ready as can be, and the next, she looks at me as if I was an ogre!"

"Perhaps we don't understand what you mean," said Mr. Benson.

"The thing is this. You know I've no children; and I can't say I've ever fretted over it much; but my wife has; and whether it is that she has infected me, or that I grieve over my good practice going to a stranger, when I ought to have had a son to take it after me, I don't know; but, of late, I've got to look with covetous eyes on all healthy boys, and at last I've settled down my wishes on this Leonard of *yours, Mrs. Denbigh.*"

Ruth could not speak; for, even yet, she did not understand what he meant. He went on:

"Now, how old is the lad?" He asked Ruth, but Miss Benson replied:

"He 'll be twelve next February."

"Umph! only twelve! He 's tall and old looking for his age. You look young enough, it is true." He said this last sentence as if to himself, but seeing Ruth crimson up, he abruptly changed his tone.

"Twelve, is he! Well, I take him from now. I don't mean that I really take him away from you," said he, softening all at once, and becoming grave and considerate. "His being your son — the son of one whom I have seen — as I have seen you, Mrs. Denbigh (out and out the best nurse I ever met with, Miss Benson; and good nurses are things we doctors know how to value) — his being your son is his great recommendation to me; not but what the lad himself is a noble boy. I shall be glad to leave him with you as long and as much as we can; he could not be tied to your apron-string all his life, you know. Only I provide for his education, subject to your consent and good pleasure, and he is bound apprentice *to me. I, his* guardian, bind him to myself, the first

surgeon in Eccleston, be the other who he may; and in process of time he becomes partner, and some day or other succeeds me. Now, Mrs. Denbigh, what have you got to say against this plan? My wife is just as full of it as me. Come! begin with your objections. You're not a woman if you have not a whole bag-full of them ready to turn out against any reasonable proposal."

"I don't know," faltered Ruth. "It is so sudden —"

"It is very, very kind of you, Mr. Davis," said Miss Benson, a little scandalised at Ruth's non-expression of gratitude.

"Pooh! pooh! I'll answer for it, in the long run, I am taking good care of my own interests. Come, Mrs. Denbigh, is it a bargain?"

Now Mr. Benson spoke.

"Mr. Davis, it is rather sudden, as she says. As far as I can see, it is the best as well as the kindest proposal that could have been made; but I think we must give her a little time to think about it."

"Well, twenty-four hours! Will that do?"

Ruth lifted up her head. "Mr. Davis, I am not ungrateful because I can't thank you" (she was crying *while she spoke*); "let me have a fortnight to consider

about it. In a fortnight I will make up my mind. Oh, how good you all are!"

"Very well. Then this day fortnight — Thursday the 28th — you will let me know your decision. Mind! if it's against me, I sha'n't consider it a decision, for I'm determined to carry my point. I'm not going to make Mrs. Denbigh blush, Mr. Benson, by telling you, in her presence, of all I have observed about her this last three weeks, that has made me sure of the good qualities I shall find in this boy of hers. I was watching her when she little thought it. Do you remember that night when Hector O'Brien was so furiously delirious, Mrs. Denbigh?"

Ruth went very white at the remembrance.

"Why now, look there! how pale she is at the very thought of it. And yet, I assure you, she was the one to go up and take the piece of glass from him which he had broken out of the window for the sole purpose of cutting his throat, or the throat of any one else, for that matter. I wish we had some others as brave as she is."

"I thought the great panic was passed away!" said Mr. Benson.

"*Ay! the* general feeling of alarm is much weaker;

but, here and there, there are as great fools as ever. Why, when I leave here, I am going to see our precious member, Mr. Donne —"

"Mr. Donne?" said Ruth.

"Mr. Donne, who lies ill at the Queen's — came last week, with the intention of canvassing, but was too much alarmed by what he heard of the fever to set to work; and, in spite of all his precautions, he has taken it; and you should see the terror they are in at the hotel; landlord, landlady, waiters, servants — all; there's not a creature will go near him, if they can help it; and there's only his groom — a lad he saved from drowning, I'm told — to do anything for him. I must get him a proper nurse, somehow or somewhere, for all my being a Cranworth-man. Ah, Mr. Benson! you don't know the temptations we medical men have. Think, if I allowed your member to die now, as he might very well, if he had no nurse — how famously Mr. Cranworth would walk over the course! — Where's Mrs. Denbigh gone to? I hope I've not frightened her away by reminding her of Hector O'Brien, and that awful night, when I do assure you she behaved like a heroine!"

As Mr. Benson was showing Mr. Davis out, Ruth

opened the study-door, and said, in a very calm, voice:

"Mr. Benson! will you allow me to speak to Davis alone?"

Mr. Benson immediately consented, thinking in all probability, she wished to ask some fur questions about Leonard; but as Mr. Davis came the room, and shut the door, he was struck by pale, stern face of determination, and awaited speaking first.

"Mr. Davis! I must go and nurse Mr. Bellingha said she at last, clenching her hands tight toge but no other part of her body moving from its int stillness.

"Mr. Bellingham?" asked he, astonished at name.

"Mr. Donne, I mean," said she, hurriedly. " name was Bellingham."

"Oh! I remember hearing he had changed his n for some property. But you must not think of more such work just now. You are not fit for it. are looking as white as ashes."

"*I must go,*" she repeated.

"Nonsense! Here's a man who can pay for the care of the first hospital nurses in London — and I doubt if his life is worth the risk of one of theirs even, much more of yours."

"We have no right to weigh human lives against each other."

"No! I know we have not. But it's a way we doctors are apt to get into; and, at any rate, it's ridiculous of you to think of such a thing. Just listen to reason."

"I can't! I can't!" cried she, with sharp pain in her voice. "You must let me go, dear Mr. Davis!" said she, now speaking with soft entreaty.

"No!" said he, shaking his head authoritatively. "I'll do no such thing."

"Listen!" said she, dropping her voice, and going all over the deepest scarlet; "he is Leonard's father! Now! you will let me go!"

Mr. Davis was indeed staggered by what she said, and for a moment he did not speak. So she went on:

"You will not tell! You must not tell! No one knows, not even Mr. Benson, who it was. And now — it might do him so much harm to have it known. You will *not tell!*"

"No! I will not tell," replied he. "But, Mrs. Der bigh, you must answer me this one question, which ask you in all true respect, but which I must ask, i order to guide both myself and you aright — Of cour I knew Leonard was illegitimate — in fact, I will giv you secret for secret: it was being so myself that fir made me sympathise with him, and desire to adopt hin I knew that much of your history; but tell me, d you now care for this man? Answer me truly — d you love him?"

For a moment or two she did not speak; her hea was bent down; then she raised it up, and looked wi clear and honest eyes into his face.

"I have been thinking — but I do not know — cannot tell — I don't think I should love him, if I were well and happy — but you said he was ill - and alone — how can I help caring for him? — ho can I help caring for him?" repeated she, coverii her face with her hands, and the quick hot tea stealing through her fingers. "He is Leonard's father continued she, looking up at Mr. Davis suddenly. "I need not know — he shall not — that I have ev *been* near him. If he is like the others, he must l

delirious — I will leave him before he comes to himself — but now let me go — I must go."

"I wish my tongue had been bitten out before I had named him to you. He would do well enough without you; and, I dare say, if he recognises you, he will only be annoyed."

"It is very likely!" said Ruth, heavily.

"Annoyed, — why! he may curse you for your unasked-for care of him. I have heard my poor mother — and she was as pretty and delicate a creature as you are — cursed for showing tenderness when it was not wanted. Now, be persuaded by an old man like me, who has seen enough of life to make his heart ache — leave this fine gentleman to his fate. I 'll promise you to get him as good a nurse as can be had for money."

"No!" said Ruth, with dull persistency — as if she had not attended to his dissuasions; "I must go. I will leave him before he recognises me."

"Why, then," said the old surgeon, "if you 're so bent upon it, I suppose I must let you. It is but what my mother would have done — poor, heart-broken thing! However, come along, and let us make the *best of it.* *It* saves me a deal of trouble, I know;

for, if I have you for a right hand, I need not worry myself continually with wondering how he is taken care of. Go! get your bonnet, you tender-hearted fool of a woman! Let us get you out of the house without any more scenes or explanations; I 'll make all straight with the Bensons."

"You will not tell my secret, Mr. Davis," she said, abruptly.

"No! not I! Does the woman think I had never to keep a secret of the kind before? I only hope he 'll lose his election, and never come near the place again. After all," continued he, sighing, "I suppose it is but human nature!" He began recalling the circumstances of his own early life, and dreamily picturing scenes in the grey dying embers of the fire; and he was almost startled when she stood before him, ready equipped, grave, pale, and quiet.

"Come along!" said he. "If you 're to do any good at all, it must be in these next three days. After that, I 'll ensure his life for this bout; and mind! I shall send you home then; for he might know you, and I 'll have no excitement to throw him back again, *and no sobbing* and crying from you. But now every *moment* your care is precious to him. I shall tell my

own story to the Bensons, as soon as I have installed you."

Mr. Donne lay in the best room of the Queen's Hotel — no one with him but his faithful, ignorant servant, who was as much afraid of the fever as any one else could be, but who, nevertheless, would not leave his master — his master who had saved his life as a child, and afterwards put him in the stables at Bellingham Hall, where he learnt all that he knew. He stood in a farther corner of the room, watching his delirious master with affrighted eyes, not daring to come near him, nor yet willing to leave him.

"Oh! if that doctor would but come! He 'll kill himself or me — and them stupid servants won't stir a step over the threshold; how shall I get over the night? Blessings on him — here 's the old doctor back again! I hear him creaking and scolding up the stairs!"

The door opened, and Mr. Davis entered, followed by Ruth.

"Here 's the nurse, my good man — such a nurse as there is not in the three counties. Now, all you 'll *have to do is to* mind what she says."

"Oh, Sir! he 's mortal bad! won't you stay with us through the night, Sir?"

"Look there!" whispered Mr. Davis to the man, "see how she knows how to manage him! why, I could not do it better myself!"

She had gone up to the wild, raging figure, and with soft authority had made him lie down: and then, placing a basin of cold water by the bedside, she had dipped in it her pretty hands, and was laying their cool dampness on his hot brow, speaking in a low soothing voice all the time, in a way that acted like a charm in hushing his mad talk.

"But I will stay!" said the doctor, after he had examined his patient; "as much on her account as his! and partly to quieten the fears of this poor, faithful fellow."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE third night after this was to be the crisis — the turning point between Life and Death. Mr. Davis came again to pass it by the bedside of the sufferer. Ruth was there, constant and still, intent upon watching the symptoms, and acting according to them, in obedience to Mr. Davis's directions. She had never left the room. Every sense had been strained in watching — every power of thought or judgment had been kept on the full stretch. Now that Mr. Davis came and took her place, and that the room was quiet for the night, she became oppressed with heaviness, which yet did not tend to sleep. She could not remember the present time, or where she was. All times of her earliest youth — the days of her childhood — were in her memory with a minuteness and fulness of detail which was miserable; for all along she felt that she had no real grasp on the scenes that were passing through her mind — that, somehow, they were long gone by, *and gone by for* ever — and yet she could not re-

member who she was now, nor where she was, and whether she had now any interests in life to take the place of those which she was conscious had passed away, although their remembrance filled her mind with painful acuteness. Her head lay on her arms, and they rested on the table. Every now and then she opened her eyes, and saw the large room, handsomely furnished with articles that were each one incongruous with the other, as if bought at sales. She saw the flickering night-light — she heard the ticking of the watch, and the two breathings, each going on at a separate rate — one hurried, abruptly stopping, and then panting violently, as if to make up for lost time; and the other slow, steady and regular, as if the breather was asleep; but this supposition was contradicted by an occasional repressed sound of yawning. The sky through the uncurtained window looked dark and black — would this night never have an end? Had the sun gone down for ever, and would the world at last awaken to a general sense of everlasting night?

Then she felt as if she ought to get up, and go and see how the troubled sleeper in yonder bed was struggling through his illness; but she could not remember who the sleeper was, and she shrunk from seeing some

phantom-face on the pillow, such as now began to haunt the dark corners of the room, and look at her, jibbering and mowing as they looked. So she covered her face again, and sank into a whirling stupor of sense and feeling. By-and-by she heard her fellow-watcher stirring, and a dull wonder stole over her as to what he was doing; but the heavy languor pressed her down, and kept her still. At last she heard the words, "Come here," and listlessly obeyed the command. She had to steady herself in the rocking chamber before she could walk to the bed by which Mr. Davis stood; but the effort to do so roused her, and, although conscious of an oppressive headache, she viewed with sudden and clear vision all the circumstances of her present position. Mr. Davis was near the head of the bed, holding the night-lamp high, and shading it with his hand, that it might not disturb the sick person, who lay with his face towards them, in feeble exhaustion, but with every sign that the violence of the fever had left him. It so happened that the rays of the lamp fell bright and full upon Ruth's countenance, as she stood with her crimson lips parted with the hurrying breath, and the fever-flush brilliant on her cheeks. Her eyes were wide open, and their

pupils distended. She looked on the invalid in silence, and hardly understood why Mr. Davis had summoned her there.

"Don't you see the change? He is better! — the crisis is past!"

But she did not speak; her looks were riveted on his softly-unclosing eyes, which met hers as they opened languidly. She could not stir or speak. She was held fast by that gaze of his, in which a faint recognition dawned, and grew to strength.

He murmured some words. They strained their sense to hear. He repeated them even lower than before; but this time they caught what he was saying.

"Where are the water-lilies? Where are the lilies in her hair?"

Mr. Davis drew Ruth away.

"He is stil rambling," said he. "But the fever has left him."

The grey dawn was now filling the room with its cold light; was it that made Ruth's cheek so deadly pale? Could that call out the wild entreaty of her *look, as if imploring* help against some cruel foe that *held her fast,* and was wrestling with her Spirit of

Life? She held Mr. Davis's arm. If she had let it go, she would have fallen.

"Take me home," she said, and fainted dead away.

Mr. Davis carried her out of the chamber, and sent the groom to keep watch by his master. He ordered a fly to convey her to Mr. Benson's, and lifted her in when it came, for she was still half unconscious. It was he who carried her up-stairs to her room; where Miss Benson and Sally undressed and laid her in her bed.

He awaited their proceedings in Mr. Benson's study. When Mr. Benson came in, Mr. Davis said:

"Don't blame me. Don't add to my self-reproach. I have killed her. I was a cruel fool to let her go. Don't speak to me."

"It may not be so bad," said Mr. Benson, himself needing comfort in that shock. "She may recover. She surely will recover. I believe she will."

"No, no! she won't. But by — she shall, if I can save her." Mr. Davis looked defiantly at Mr. Benson, as if he were Fate. "I tell you she shall recover, or else I am a murderer. What business had *I to take her to nurse* him —"

He was cut short by Sally's entrance, and announcement that Ruth was now prepared to see him.

From that time forward Mr. Davis devoted all his leisure, his skill, his energy to save her. He called on the rival surgeon to beg him to undertake the management of Mr. Donne's recovery, saying, with his usual self-mockery, "I could not answer it to Mr. Cranworth if I had brought his opponent round, you know, when I had had such a fine opportunity in my power. Now, with your patients, and general Radical interest, it will be rather a feather in your cap; for he may want a good deal of care yet, though he is getting on famously — so rapidly, in fact, that it's a strong temptation to me to throw him back — a relapse, you know."

The other surgeon bowed gravely, apparently taking Mr. Davis in earnest, but certainly very glad of the job thus opportunely thrown in his way. In spite of Mr. Davis's real and deep anxiety about Ruth, he could not help chuckling over his rival's literal interpretation of all he had said.

"To be sure, what fools men are! I don't know *why one* should watch and strive to keep them in the *world.* I have given this fellow something to talk

about confidentially to all his patients; I wonder how much stronger a dose the man would have swallowed! I must begin to take care of my practice for that lad yonder. Well-a-day! well-a-day! What was this sick fine gentleman sent here for, that she should run a chance of her life for him? or why was he sent into the world at all, for that matter?"

Indeed, however much Mr. Davis might labour with all his professional skill — however much they might all watch — and pray — and weep — it was but too evident that Ruth "home must go, and take her wages." Poor, poor Ruth!

It might be that, utterly exhausted by watching and nursing, first in the hospital, and then by the bedside of her former lover, the power of her constitution was worn out; or, it might be, her gentle, pliant sweetness, but she displayed no outrage or discord even in her delirium. There she lay in the attic-room in which her baby had been born, her watch over him kept, her confession to him made; and now she was stretched on the bed in utter helplessness, softly gazing at vacancy with her open, unconscious eyes, from which all the depth of their meaning had fled, and all they *told was of a sweet,* child-like insanity within. The

watchers could not touch her with their sympathy, or come near her in her dim world; — so, mutely, but looking at each other from time to time with tearful eyes, they took a poor comfort from the one evident fact that, though lost and gone astray, she was happy and at peace. They had never heard her sing; indeed the simple art which her mother had taught her, had died, with her early joyousness, at that dear mother's death. But now she sang continually, very soft and low. She went from one old childish ditty to another without let or pause, keeping a strange sort of time with her pretty fingers, as they closed and unclosed themselves upon the counterpane. She never looked at any one with the slightest glimpse of memory or intelligence in her face; no, not even at Leonard.

Her strength faded day by day; but she knew it not. Her sweet lips were parted to sing, even after the breath and the power to do so had left her, and her fingers fell idly on the bed. Two days she lingered thus — all but gone from them, and yet still there.

They stood around her bedside, not speaking, or sighing, or moaning; they were too much awed by the *exquisite* peacefulness of her look for that. Suddenly *she opened* wide her eyes, and gazed intently forwards,

as if she saw some happy vision, which called out a lovely, rapturous, breathless smile. They held their very breaths.

"I see the Light coming," said she. "The Light is coming," she said. And, raising herself slowly, she stretched out her arms, and then fell back, very still for evermore.

They did not speak. Mr. Davis was the first to utter a word.

"It is over!" said he. "She is dead!"

Outrang through the room the cry of Leonard:

"Mother! mother! mother! You have not left me alone! You will not leave me alone! You are not dead! Mother! Mother!"

They had pent in his agony of apprehension till then, that no wail of her child might disturb her ineffable calm. But now there was a cry heard through the house, of one refusing to be comforted: "Mother! Mother!"

But Ruth lay dead.

CHAPTER XIV.

A STUPOR of grief succeeded to Leonard's passionate cries. He became so much depressed, physically as well as mentally, before the end of the day, that Mr. Davis was seriously alarmed for the consequences. He hailed with gladness a proposal made by the Farquhars, that the boy should be removed to their house, and placed under the fond care of his mother's friend, who sent her own child to Abermouth the better to devote herself to Leonard.

When they told him of this arrangement, he at first refused to go and leave *her;* but when Mr. Benson said: "*She* would have wished it, Leonard! Do it for her sake!" he went away very quietly; not speaking a word, after Mr. Benson had made the voluntary promise that he should see her once again. He neither spoke nor cried for many hours; and all Jemima's delicate wiles were called forth, before his heavy heart could find the relief of tears. And then he was so weak, and his pulse so low, that all who loved him *feared for his* life.

Anxiety about him made a sad distraction from the sorrow for the dead. The three old people who now formed the household in the Chapel-house, went about slowly and dreamily, each with a dull wonder at their hearts why they, the infirm and worn-out, were left, while she was taken in her lovely prime.

The third day after Ruth's death, a gentleman came to the door and asked to speak to Mr. Benson. He was very much wrapped up in furs and cloaks, and the upper exposed part of his face was sunk and hollow, like that of one but partially recovered from illness. Mr. and Miss Benson were at Mr. Farquhar's, gone to see Leonard, and poor old Sally had been having a hearty cry over the kitchen fire before answering the door-knock. Her heart was tenderly inclined just then towards any one who had the aspect of suffering; so, although her master was out, and she was usually chary of admitting strangers, she proposed to Mr. Donne (for it was he) that he should come in and await Mr. Benson's return in the study. He was glad enough to avail himself of her offer; for he was feeble and nervous, and *come on a piece* of business which he exceedingly

disliked, and about which he felt very awkward. The fire was nearly, if not quite, out; nor did Sally's vigorous blows do much good, although she left the room with an assurance that it would soon burn up. He leant against the chimney-piece, thinking over events, and with a sensation of discomfort, both external and internal, growing and gathering upon him. He almost wondered whether the proposal he meant to make with regard to Leonard, could not be better arranged by letter than by an interview. He became very shivery, and impatient of the state of indecision to which his bodily weakness had reduced him.

Sally opened the door, and came in. "Would you like to walk up-stairs, Sir?" asked she, in a trembling voice, for she had learnt who the visitor was from the driver of the fly, who had run up to the house to inquire what was detaining the gentleman that he had brought from the Queen's Hotel; and, knowing that Ruth had caught the fatal fever from her attendance on Mr. Donne, Sally imagined that it was but a piece of sad civility to invite him up-stairs to see the poor dead body, which she had *laid out* and decked for the grave, with such fond

care that she had grown strangely proud of its marble beauty.

Mr. Donne was glad enough of any proposal of a change from the cold and comfortless room where he had thought uneasy, remorseful thoughts. He fancied that a change of place would banish the train of reflection that was troubling him; but the change he anticipated was to a well-warmed, cheerful sitting-room, with signs of life, and a bright fire therein; and he was on the last flight of stairs, — at the door of the room where Ruth lay — before he understood whither Sally was conducting him. He shrank back for an instant, and then a strange sting of curiosity impelled him on. He stood in the humble low-roofed attic, the window open, and the tops of the distant snow-covered hills filling up the whiteness of the general aspect. He muffled himself up in his cloak, and shuddered, while Sally reverently drew down the sheet, and showed the beautiful, calm, still face, on which the last rapturous smile still lingered, giving an ineffable look of bright serenity. Her arms were crossed over her breast; the wimple-like cap marked the perfect oval of her face, while two braids of the waving auburn hair

peeped out of the narrow border, and lay on the delicate cheeks.

He was awed into admiration by the wonderful beauty of that dead woman.

"How beautiful she is!" said he, beneath his breath. "Do all dead people look so peaceful — so happy?"

"Not all," replied Sally, crying. "Few has been as good and as gentle as she was in their lives." She quite shook with her sobbing.

Mr. Donne was disturbed by her distress.

"Come, my good woman! we must all die —" he did not know what to say, and was becoming infected by her sorrow. "I am sure you loved her very much, and were very kind to her in her life-time; you must take this from me to buy yourself some remembrance of her." He had pulled out a sovereign, and really had a kindly desire to console her, and reward her, in offering it to her.

But she took her apron from her eyes, as soon as she became aware of what he was doing, and, still holding it midway in her hands, she looked at him indignantly, before she burst out:

"*And* who are you, that think to pay for my

kindness to her by money? And I was not kind to you, my darling," said she, passionately addressing the motionless, serene body — "I was not kind to you. I frabbed you, and plagued you from the first, my lamb! I came and cut off your pretty locks in this very room — I did — and you said never an angry word to me; — no! not then, nor many a time at after, when I was very sharp and cross to you. — No! I never was kind to you, and I dunnot think the world was kind to you, my darling, — but you are gone where the angels are very tender to such as you — you are, my poor wench!" She bent down and kissed the lips, from whose marble, unyielding touch Mr. Donne recoiled, even in thought.

Just then, Mr. Benson entered the room. He had returned home before his sister, and come up-stairs in search of Sally, to whom he wanted to speak on some subject relating to the funeral. He bowed in recognition of Mr. Donne, whom he knew as the member for the town, and whose presence impressed him painfully, as his illness had been the proximate cause of Ruth's death. But he *tried to check this* feeling, as it was no fault of

Mr. Donne's. Sally stole out of the room, to cry at leisure in her kitchen.

"I must apologise for being here," said Mr. Donne. "I was hardly conscious where your servant was leading me to, when she expressed her wish that I should walk up-stairs."

"It is a very common idea in this town, that it is a gratification to be asked to take a last look at the dead," replied Mr. Benson.

"And in this case, I am glad to have seen her once more," said Mr. Donne. "Poor Ruth!"

Mr. Benson glanced up at him at the last word. How did he know her name? To him she had only been Mrs. Denbigh. But Mr. Donne had no idea that he was talking to one unaware of the connexion that had formerly existed between them; and, though he would have preferred carrying on the conversation in a warmer room, yet, as Mr. Benson was still gazing at her with sad, lingering love, he went on:

"I did not recognise her when she came to nurse me; I believe I was delirious. My servant, who had known her long ago, in Fordham, told me who she *was.* I cannot tell you how I regret that she should *have died in* consequence of her love of me."

Mr. Benson looked up at him again, a stern light filling his eyes as he did so. He waited impatiently to hear more, either to quench or confirm his suspicions. If she had not been lying there, very still and calm, he would have forced the words out of Mr. Donne, by some abrupt question. As it was, he listened silently, his heart quick-beating.

"I know that money is but a poor compensation, — is no remedy for this event, or for my youthful folly."

Mr. Benson set his teeth hard together, to keep in words little short of a curse.

"Indeed, I offered her money to almost any amount before; — do me justice, Sir," catching the gleam of indignation on Mr. Benson's face: "I offered to marry her, and provide for the boy as if he had been legitimate. It's of no use recurring to that time," said he, his voice faltering; "what is done cannot be undone. But I came now to say, that I should be glad to leave the boy still under your charge, and that every expense you think it right to incur in his education I will gladly defray; — and place a sum of money in trust for him — say, two thousand pounds — or more: *fix what you will.* Of course, if you decline retaining

him, I must find some one else; but the provision for him shall be the same, for my poor Ruth's sake."

Mr. Benson did not speak. He could not, till he had gathered some peace from looking at the ineffable repose of the Dead.

Then, before he answered, he covered up her face; and in his voice there was the stillness of ice.

"Leonard is not unprovided for. Those that honoured his mother will take care of him. He shall never touch a penny of your money. Every offer of service you have made, I reject in his name, — and in her presence," said he, bending towards the Dead. "Men may call such actions as yours, youthful follies! There is another name for them with God. Sir! I will follow you down-stairs."

All the way down, Mr. Benson heard Mr. Donne's voice urging and entreating, but the words he could not recognise for the thoughts that filled his brain — the rapid putting together of events that was going on there. And when Mr. Donne turned at the door, to speak again, and repeat his offers of service to Leonard, Mr. Benson made answer, without well knowing *whether the* answer fitted the question or not.

"I thank God, you have no right, legal or otherwise, over the child. And for her sake, I will spare him the shame of ever hearing your name as his father."

He shut the door in Mr. Donne's face.

"An ill-bred, puritanical old fellow! He may have the boy, I am sure, for aught I care. I have done my duty, and will get out of this abominable place as soon as I can. I wish my last remembrance of my beautiful Ruth was not mixed up with all these people."

Mr. Benson was bitterly oppressed with this interview; it disturbed the peace with which he was beginning to contemplate events. His anger ruffled him, although such anger had been just, and such indignation well-deserved; and both had been unconsciously present in his heart for years against the unknown seducer, whom he met face to face by the death-bed of Ruth.

[redacted]ave him a shock which he did not recover from for many days. He was nervously afraid lest Mr. Donne should appear at the funeral; and not all the reasons he alleged to himself against this apprehension, put it utterly *away from him.* Before then, however, he heard *casually (for he would* allow himself no inquiries) that

he had left the town. No! Ruth's funeral passed over in calm and simple solemnity. Her child, her own household, her friend, and Mr. Farquhar, quietly walked after the bier, which was borne by some of the poor to whom she had been very kind in her lifetime. And many others stood aloof in the little burying-ground, sadly watching that last ceremony.

They slowly dispersed; Mr. Benson leading Leonard by the hand, and secretly wondering at his self-restraint. Almost as soon as they had let themselves into the Chapel-house, a messenger brought a note from Mrs. Bradshaw, with a pot of quince marmalade, which, she said to Miss Benson, she thought that Leonard might fancy, and if he did, they were to be sure and let her know, as she had plenty more; or, was there anything else that he would like? She would gladly make him whatever he fancied.

Poor Leonard! he lay stretched on the sofa, white and tearless, beyond the power of any such comfort, however kindly offered; but this was only one of the many homely, simple attentions, which all came round him to offer, from Mr. Grey, the rector, down to the *nameless poor* who called at the back door to inquire *how it fared* with *her* child.

Mr. Benson was anxious, according to Dissenting custom, to preach an appropriate funeral sermon. It was the last office he could render to her; it should be done well and carefully. Moreover, it was possible that the circumstances of her life, which were known to all, might be made effective in this manner to work conviction of many truths. Accordingly, he made great preparation of thought and paper; he laboured hard, destroying sheet after sheet — his eyes filling with tears between-whiles, as he remembered some fresh proof of the humility and sweetness of her life. Oh, that he could do her justice! but words seemed hard and inflexible, and refused to fit themselves to his ideas. He sat late on Saturday, writing; he watched through the night till Sunday morning was far advanced. He had never taken such pains with any sermon, and he was only half satisfied with it after all.

Mrs. Farquhar had comforted the bitterness of Sally's grief by giving her very handsome mourning. At any rate, she felt oddly proud and exulting when she thought of her new black gown; but when she remembered why she wore it, she scolded herself pretty sharply for her satisfaction, and took to crying afresh

with redoubled vigour. She spent the Sunday morning in alternately smoothing down her skirts, and adjusting her broad hemmed collar, or bemoaning the occasion with tearful earnestness. But the sorrow overcame the little quaint vanity of her heart, as she saw troop after troop of humbly-dressed mourners pass by into the old chapel. They were very poor — but each had mounted some rusty piece of crape, or some faded black ribbon. The old came halting and slow — the mothers carried their quiet, awe-struck babes.

And not only these were there — but others — equally unaccustomed to nonconformist worship: Mr. Davis, for instance, to whom Sally acted as chaperone; for he sat in the minister's pew, as a stranger; and, as she afterwards said, she had a fellow-feeling with him, being a Church-woman herself, and Dissenters had such awkward ways; however, she had been there before, so she could set him to rights about their fashions.

From the pulpit, Mr. Benson saw one and all — the well-filled Bradshaw pew — all in deep mourning, Mr. Bradshaw conspicuously so (he would have *attended the* funeral gladly if they would have asked *him)* — *the* Farquhars — the many strangers — the

still more numerous poor — one or two wild-looking outcasts, who stood afar off, but wept silently and continually. Mr. Benson's heart grew very full.

His voice trembled as he read and prayed. But he steadied it as he opened his sermon — his great, last effort in her honour — the labour that he had prayed God to bless to the hearts of many. For an instant the old man looked on all the upturned faces, listening, with wet eyes, to hear what he could say to interpret that which was in their hearts, dumb and unshaped, of God's doings as shown in her life. He looked, and, as he gazed, a mist came before him, and he could not see his sermon, nor his hearers, but only Ruth, as she had been — stricken low, and crouching from sight, in the upland field by Llan-dhu — like a woeful, hunted creature. And now her life was over! her struggle ended! Sermon and all was forgotten. He sat down, and hid his face in his hands for a minute or so. Then he arose, pale and serene. He put the sermon away, and opened the Bible, and read the seventh chapter of Revelations, beginning at the ninth verse.

Before it was finished, most of his hearers were in *tears. It came home* to them as more appropriate than

any sermon could have been. Even Sally, though full of anxiety as to what her fellow-Churchman would think of such proceedings, let the sobs come freely as she heard the words:

"And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

"Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

"They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

"For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

"He preaches sermons sometimes," said Sally, *nudging* Mr. Davis, as they rose from their knees at *last.* "I make no doubt there was as grand a sermon

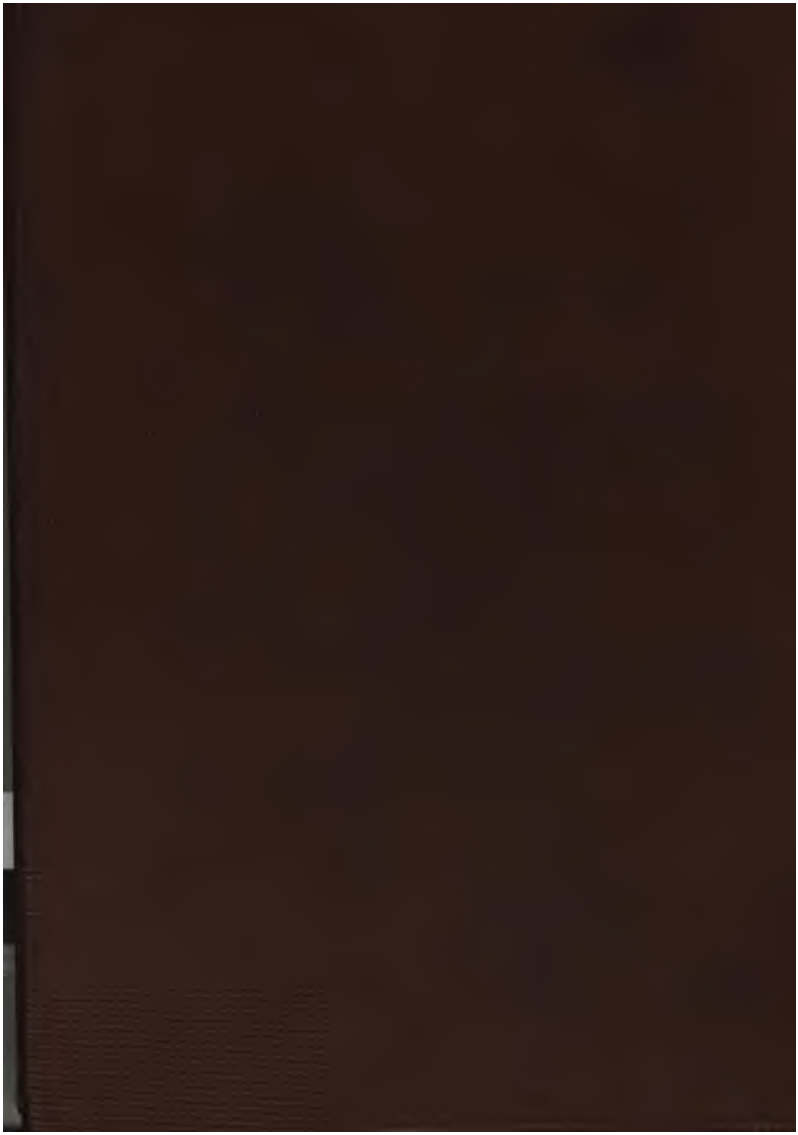
in yon paper-book as ever we hear in church. I've heard him pray uncommon fine — quite beyond any but learned folk."

Mr. Bradshaw had been anxious to do something to testify his respect for the woman, who, if all had entertained his opinions, would have been driven into hopeless sin. Accordingly, he ordered the first stone-mason of the town to meet him in the chapel-yard on Monday morning, to take measurement and receive directions for a tombstone. They threaded their way among the grassy heaps to where Ruth was buried, in the south corner, beneath the great Wych-elm. When they got there, Leonard raised himself up from the new-stirred turf. His face was swollen with weeping; but when he saw Mr. Bradshaw he calmed himself, and checked his sobs, and, as an explanation of being where he was when thus surprised, he could find nothing to say but the simple words:

"My mother is dead, Sir."

His eyes sought those of Mr. Bradshaw with a wild look of agony, as if to find comfort for that great loss in human sympathy; and at the first word — the first *touch of Mr.* Bradshaw's hand on his shoulder — *he burst out afresh.*

"Come, come! my boy! — Mr. Francis, I will see you about this to-morrow — I will call at your house. — Let me take you home, my poor fellow. Come, my lad, come!"

The first time, for years, that he had entered Mr. Benson's house, he came leading and comforting her son — and, for a moment, he could not speak to his old friend, for the sympathy which choked up his voice, and filled his eyes with tears.

THE END.